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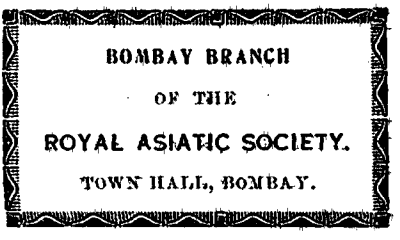

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THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA

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THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA

OVER THE PAMÏR TO INDIA.

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By GABRIEL BONVALOT.

WITH 250 ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ALBERT PÉPIN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY C. B. PITMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LIB OF BOM BRAN OF TH ROYAL ASIATIC

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LIMITED.

1889.

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Dedication.

TO

HIS EXCELLENCY

THE MARQUIS OF DUFFERIN AND AVA,

K.P., P.C., K.C.B., ETC.

My Lord,

You made us feel happy indeed when you sent us such a gracious letter to Mastudj. At Simla, you gave us so kind a reception that the least we can do, in token of our gratitude, is to dedicate to you the English translation of the narrative of our travels. May we hope that you will read it with interest.

G. BONVALOT.

November, 1888.

PREFACE.

CENTRAL ASIA, through which I have just travelled for the second time, has always had a great fascination for me. It is not surprising that such should be the case. This region of the earth is made up of contrasts. You find there, in the midst of the dreariest deserts, oases of the greatest fertility, and you come upon towns full of life and animation as you emerge from solitudes upon which a profound silence confers something like grandeur. The traveller, whose mouth is still parched by the brackish waters drawn from the cisterns of the arid steppe, suddenly sees before him rivers with the majestic aspect of an inland sea, the water of which is delightful to the palate. After having wended his way over boundless plains, he reaches the foot of mountains, the peaks of which, rising high into the heavens, are barely visible to the naked eye. If he has the pluck to cross this barrier, climbing upwards along steep and rough paths, he finds himself in the midst of an ocean of mountains, out of which it seems a hopeless task to seek an issue; and if he climbs up and down for weeks and months together, sometimes seeing only a small blue corner of the sky, if he directs his course due east, he will eventually come out into a land where the watercourses are abundant,

where naked men cultivate, with the help of gigantic animals, lands of incredible fertility.

What adds to the interest of visiting a land, the configuration of which is so strange, is that it is inhabited by races of the most diverse types, that we are ourselves believed to have had ancestors there, and that the opinion prevails among men of science that the first of the human race felt in this country their first requirements and aspirations, and that our earliest ancestors found their way from there to the West, carrying in their trains a certain faculty of speech, certain creeds and aptitudes, which they shed as they moved westward, and the traces of which may be followed, so to speak, along the route they took.

Add to this that Central Asia has a very glorious past, by which I mean that it has been traversed by the most illustrious conqueror of antiquity, by the greatest of the Moguls, and that it has given birth to a formidable man who, lame as he was, made all Europe to tremble. It could not but be interesting to visit the arena upon which warriors such as these had made their evolutions and to follow the track of their armies; it was interesting, too, to see what remained of their work, and what had become of the workmen with whom they achieved such great things.

We were anxious, by means of a careful examination of the land and its inhabitants, to penetrate into the past of Asia, and to shed as much light as possible upon its history with the torch of geography. We wanted to see certain things in order to understand them better, and to ascertain how, in analogous circumstances, the men of the past, whose doings now take us by surprise, acted.

We started with the conviction that history had a continous existence, that it was only necessary to go from one country to another to find one's self in a different age, and that the best way to understand the methods of the great masters of history was to be one of them upon a very humble scale.

We were imbued by this idea when we embarked at Marseilles for Batum, and, keeping our eyes open all the way, traversed the Caucasus, the Lenkoran, the Talich, inhabited by people with the customs of feudal times, then Persia, by the great historical way running from west to east, in the company of pilgrims bound at once on prayer and traffic as in the Middle Ages, and finally the land of the Turkomans and Bokhara. We had no sooner entered Afghanistan, than we were stopped by the same Ishak-Khan, who has just been in revolt against his master and friend, Abdur-Rahman-Khan. We then retraced our steps, following the route of Alexander the Great, the Arabs, and so many others, and at length reached the further end of the Ferghana, at the foot of "the roof of the world," where the civilization of the East on the one side and that of the West on the other expire, like the furthest eddies of two tides which run into each other. As all the routes through inhabited regions were barred to us, we determined to improvise one over the Pamir, where we were less likely to be stopped by man, and where the obstacles in our path were raised by nature. Upon the other side of "the roof of the world," we should find among the mountains the drift of the great shipwreck of the races which inhabited them in antiquity, and, beyond them, India.

Such was the object of our journey.

But while going to see what remained of the past in Asia

and what had become of the authors of such great deeds, we also had before us the spectacle of two peoples both engrossed in a work of no little grandeur.

We saw towns spring into existence, and grow to a good size in a few weeks' time; a railway made under unexampled difficulties and in a terrible climate, yet carried through the desert with such rapidity that one could almost see it lengthening out and reaching distant places almost as fast as a river which had been turned back into its usual channel.

Then we saw the vanquished of yesterday formed into a regular force and led to the combat by their conquerors against hereditary foes, pouring out their blood like water, in order to enable their masters to create more quickly the route which was to bind their earlier and later conquests more closely together. We saw, too, the vanquished, who had at first been treated with unflinching severity, and then with kindness, full of surprise at finding the new-comers so gentle with them, gradually gaining confidence as to the future, and forgetting their defeats, assembling in thousands upon holy-days and joining their shouts with those who only a short time before were driving them at the edge of the sword.

In the earlier conquests of Russia, we found great cities inhabited by emigrants belonging to the conquering race, people from the Volga and the Dnieper, cultivating the land, and humming an air as they stood at the door of village cottages. We were witnesses of the friendly relations which existed between the natives and their masters, the one joining in the family rejoicings of the other, the children with caps on their heads playing with those who wore the turban. We noticed wherever we went that the gentleness and patience of

the Slavs—down even to what in the West are their defects—served their purpose in the East. We witnessed the expansion of a nation spreading over the East its overflow of strength, of a people which at times spreads very slowly, at others pours in with the impetuosity of a tidal wave, but which never recedes; which takes root in these regions, which it regards as a prolongation of Russia.

We saw the roads which lead to those regions swarming with soldiers who were going to make a channel for the inundation to follow; soldiers who were sinewy, temperate, indefatigable, well disciplined, marching briskly to the music of accordeons and balalaïhas, the sounds of which seemed to us very much more warlike than those of the lyre. These soldiers, who seem born for Asiatic fighting, are reconstituting, from west to east, the Mogul empire upon more solid bases; they are following, in the reverse direction, much the same route as those who started from Kara-Korum, and they can find quarters which were got ready by the troopers of Gengis-Khan. I can see nothing calculated to check the advance of a people whose sources of energy and action are increasing each day, as its population grows, and as it gains confidence in its own strength and knows how to use it. Besides this, the Russians do not disseminate their forces any more than a tree does when it drops its fruit and sows its seed, and they are ever pushing forward the same frontier, so to speak, by the irresistible pressure of an inward sap.

All this causes deep concern to those whom we encountered upon the other side of the mighty mountain range. They have not the same security as those who descend, from the west, the historical slope which leads to the countries governed

by them. They have not the same confidence in the future, the same carelesness as to the morrow.

The English endeavour to put back the hour for playing the game of which they will have to provide the stakes. They cannot afford to make a single false move, and those who are at the helm keep their eyes and ears open; the least thing startles them. They display admirable tenacity, intelligence, and activity. I would compare them, without wishing to speak disrespectfully, to the Chinese conjuror who keeps twenty plates twirling in the air at the same time. This is very much what, with a useful and at the same time remunerative aim, the masters of the richest country in the world are doing. They are but a small band engaged in this arduous work, but they quit themselves like men. They are not conquerors; they did not begin by invading the country with drums beating and flags flying. They crept into this land, where their task is very much more difficult than that of the Russians on the other side, and they maintain themselves there amid millions of men, and keep them under their rule by dint of their wonderful tact. They show what can be done by traders and men of business who know what they want and go straight to their purpose. Nevertheless, their power is, whatever they may say, more or less artificial; they are making their way up stream, which tires the boldest swimmer, whereas the others are following the current, which is far easier.

While among the native populations bordering on the countries subject to the Western powers, we were able to obtain an echo of the "public opinion" of Asia as to the respective situation of the two rival nations. Having been detained as prisoners in the Tchatral for six weeks, we had plenty of time

to cross-question the natives of that country. Ten years ago, they only troubled themselves about the English, but now they are interested in the Russians, and asked us all sorts of questions about them. According to the information which, as they told us, they had gathered from the pilgrims, the Russians were poor, but had a great many soldiers. They have doubtless heard about the insignificant skirmish at Pendjeh, and this, growing as it travelled, had developed into a great battle lost by the Afghans. In fact, while we were in the Tchatral, the news got abroad that the Russians had taken a large tract of territory from the emir, Abdur-Rahman-Khan, that they would soon seize Cabul, and that their warriors were already marching upon that city. The men of Tchatral were exulting in the defeat of the Afghans, their foemen, and, as they regard the latter as excellent soldiers, so much the more formidable do the Russians appear to them.

But the Afghans are far from being defeated, and it does not seem, moreover, that either of the two powerful rivals has any immediate interest in crushing a possible ally. Afghanistan has, therefore, a chance of retaining its independence as long as its neighbours are not of one accord. The emirs of Cabul endeavour to be on good terms with each side, but as the English have declared themselves to be their protectors, it is to them that they apply when there is a frontier to be rectified, or when they want to increase the strength of their battalions by the aid of rupees.

The construction of the Transcaspian railway has given them great concern. They fully appreciate its strategical importance; they understand that the Russians have thus taken definite possession of Bokhara, and that the armies of the

Caucasus and Turkestan can now easily combine their efforts. And while they declare that they are not afraid of the English, they do not speak so confidently about the Russians. They say that they would fight to the last drop of their blood, in the event of war with them, which does not betoken much hope of victory, The long negotiations of the recent Boundary Commission, in which the English had taken up the Afghan cause, having ended in a cession of territory to the Russians, the prestige of the English has not increased in Afghanistan, the people regarding the arrangement come to as a surrender and a mark of weakness. The Russians are thought to be made of better stuff throughout all Asia, and as their finances do not admit of their indulging in the prodigalities of the Anglo-Indians, the people are more struck by their military power, while with the English it is the depth of their purse which creates so much surprise. The peoples and tribes surrounding India have got to think that they have only to stretch out their hand to those who govern the country, and they are always surprised when they do not receive anything. It is easy to see by the way in which they ask that they consider themselves entitled to largesses, and they regard the English not as mighty warriors, but very rich merchants, who have built up the edifice of their power upon piles of rupees, than which nothing could be more fragile. They fully recognize the courage of the English, they admire their wonderful public works, their fine railways, and yet they keep their eyes fixed on the Russians, and expect something good out of them. It is difficult to win the gratitude of Asiatics, and to satisfy them; and even those of India are not satisfied. I don't know what they expect to get out of a change, and they are perhaps as childish

in this respect as certain other nations. But all I know is that many a discontented Hindoo says, "When the Russians are here, things will be different." When will they be in India, or will they ever be? I am not competent to answer these questions, not knowing what the future has in store; but I do know that their coming is eagerly awaited by not a few, and that a great many expect to see them arrive.

G. BONVALOT.

P.S.—In order to explain the frequent allusions which I shall make in the following pages to previous travels in Central Asia, it may be as well to explain that MM. Plon, Nourrit and Co. published three or four years ago two volumes entitled, "En Asie Centrale," which contained an account of the journey undertaken by M. Capus and myself in the years 1880–82. Starting from Moscow, we entered Turkestan by the north-east, that is to say by way of Siberia, and we traversed part of Bokhara in company with the family of the emir, Abdur-Rahman-Khan. We then explored the mountains of Kohistan and those of the Tchatral, which form the last spurs of the Trans-Chan. Upon our return home we started from Tashkend, and, after visiting Samarcand, Bokhara, and Tchardjui, we descended the Amu, stopping at Khiva, and crossing the desolate desert of Ust-Urt in the depth of winter. During the whole of this time we were north of the river Oxus, and it was in order to complete our travels in Central Asia that we undertook the journey related in these pages.

G. B.

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THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA.

(*OVER THE PAMÏR TO INDIA.*)

CHAPTER I.

FROM MARSEILLES TO TIFLIS.

Marseilles—At sea—The Dardanelles—In a café—The school—Soldiers—Rumours of war—Recruiting—A word in favour of the Turks—The Bosphorus—Passengers—The low-lying lands—Trebizond—A naphtha city—A virgin forest—Scenery of the Rion—An old acquaintance.

BEFORE leaving Marseilles and France, we take a last look, from the summit of the Aix gateway, at that picturesque city, with its steep streets, its hills covered with houses, its quays swarming with people who gain their living out of the blue sea, upon which the church of Notre-Dame de la Garde looks down from afar. It is from the quay of La Joliette that we embark on board the *Anatolie*, a fine vessel, which is to carry us to Batum, together with tons of sugar, iron, blacking, soap, English stuffs, Marseilles coffee, nails, and what not. The *Anatolie* belongs to the company of Messrs. Paquet Brothers, who, in spite of the badness of the times, were kind enough to take us at reduced fares, for which we are glad to seize this opportunity of thanking them, as well as for the way in which we were treated while on board. The voyage was not to seem a lengthy one to us, for our captain, whose name

is Boschell, was a very cheery Breton, though that did not prevent him from being, as his men said, a thorough sailor.

But here we are under way. There is a slight mist along the coast. We pass the Château d'If, Frioul, and La Ciotat; Toulon lies hidden in a hollow of the coast to the left. The land gradually disappears, as if it was sinking behind the horizon. A few more revolutions of the screw and we can see nothing of France, not even a buoy. Even the gulls which have escorted us so far take wing back to the shore. We are unmistakably on our way to Central Asia, with the intention of travelling through the Caucasus, Lenkoran, Persia, Afghanistan, and, if possible, the Turkoman country and Bactriana. Perhaps we may reach the Kafiristan—unless, indeed, circumstances, which so often get the mastery of one, force us in some other direction. We are as much at their mercy as a nutshell upon the crest of a wave.

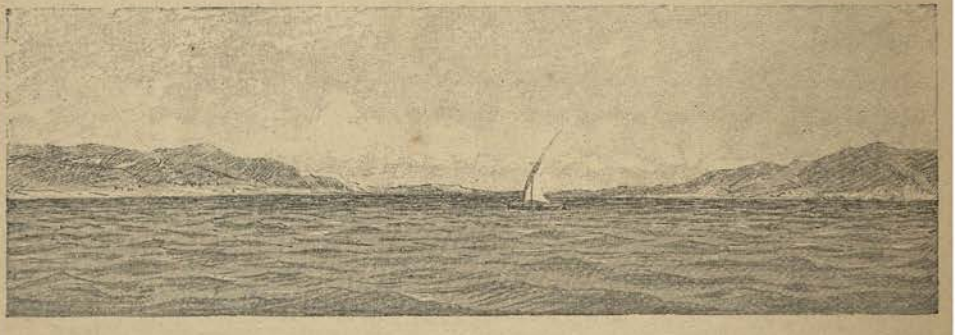
Upon the morning of March 1st, we enter the Dardanelles, having some cargo to land, and the *Anatolie* has scarcely had time to cast anchor before we are beset by a crowd of boatmen. Many of them are Greeks, and very free of speech. The Turks are more calm, and one old man, with a white beard, keeps on saying for a quarter of an hour, with praiseworthy pertinacity, "Mossou, embarcar? Embarcar, mossou?" He is imperturbable, while all the rest are shouting and gesticulating. Some of the passengers begin to bargain in a mixture of the Auvergnat, Italian, and Gascon dialects, plentifully interlarded with "Mossou" and gestures by way of explanation.

Despite the rain, we make up our mind to go ashore in one of the boats of the *Anatolie*, and, like the true land-lubbers that we all three are, we were delighted to feel our feet, muddy though the quay was.

Although we felt ourselves to be still in Europe, owing no doubt to the rainy weather, Dardanelles did not strike us as being

a very gay sort of a place, and I can quite fancy that the officers whom we saw seated on the worn divans of the Café de l'Hellespont do not have a very merry time of it. When we went there, they were smoking the chibook, drawing long whiffs, and the only sound one could hear was the rattle of the dice they were casting in silence. One of them was reading a paper, which he handed with a smile to the person sitting next to him, and pointed with his finger to a sentence which seemed to amuse him. This was the latest piece of news about the war supposed to be brewing between Greece and Turkey. We seated ourselves at a table, drawing up some heavy chairs, coarsely stuffed and painted blue. Coffee was then served us, and while the dregs were settling down at the bottom of the tiny cups, we had a look at the gaudy drawings which ornamented the dripping walls. First there was the Sultan, surrounded by his family—a man with a tremendous stomach and orders on his breast, a pointed beard, regular features, and a fez. Then there were coloured lithographs of different Turkish functionaries, with words in Turkish and in French describing their rank. Finally, there were four stout ladies, very lightly clad, meant to represent the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. These ladies were represented in nonchalant attitudes, and smiled down from their frames upon the customers of the establishment. There was even a billiard table, with balls which had all the polish off them and wobbled about in the most uncertain fashion. I must not forget, moreover, some busts, with red paint on the cheeks and black moustaches. This is a faithful description of the best café in Dardanelles, where we waited for a break in the storm, to have a look at the town. Troy was not far off, but we had no time to go and offer a sacrifice upon the tomb of Achilles, and we walked about till the whistle of the *Anatolie* summoned us back on board.

We went in the direction of the barracks, passing on our way through the bazaar, where several of the merchants spoke our language but did not keep our goods for sale. I saw articles of English, German, Austrian and Bulgarian make, but those labelled as French were evidently counterfeit, as the mistakes of spelling proved. And when we asked the keeper of one shop to sell us something French, he offered us these imitations. We pointed out to him that even the label was incorrectly imitated, and his answer was, "I know that, but your goods cost too much." This was a reply which I was to get very often in the course of my travels.



STRAITS OF MESSINA.

Next we see some little girls going to school in the company of their brothers, each of them with a bag of books slung over their shoulders. They all of them looked dirty and untidy, but they had honest, ruddy faces, with strong athletic figures. They went one by one through the muddy roads, lifting their feet very high, and laughing at one another when they got splashed, full of life and spirits, like all young children.

The fort did not give one the idea of being impregnable, but the soldiers garrisoned in it looked hale and vigorous. Badly clad in the cast-off garments of European clothing depôts, they had, nevertheless, a martial air, and belonged to the proud race of Anatolia.

But our vessel sounded her whistle, and we had to go back on board, for in an hour she would have completed her cargo, and we should be continuing our voyage. Just as we are starting, an English vessel arrives from Syria with a body of recruits. The anchor is let down in a twinkling, and the cargo is at once landed. This consists of Arabs with long, thin faces ; still young, and concealing their tattered garments beneath a burnous which once was white. Some of them are to be left at Dardanelles, and they are poured out, so to speak, from the vessel into boats, where they are

STROMBOLI.

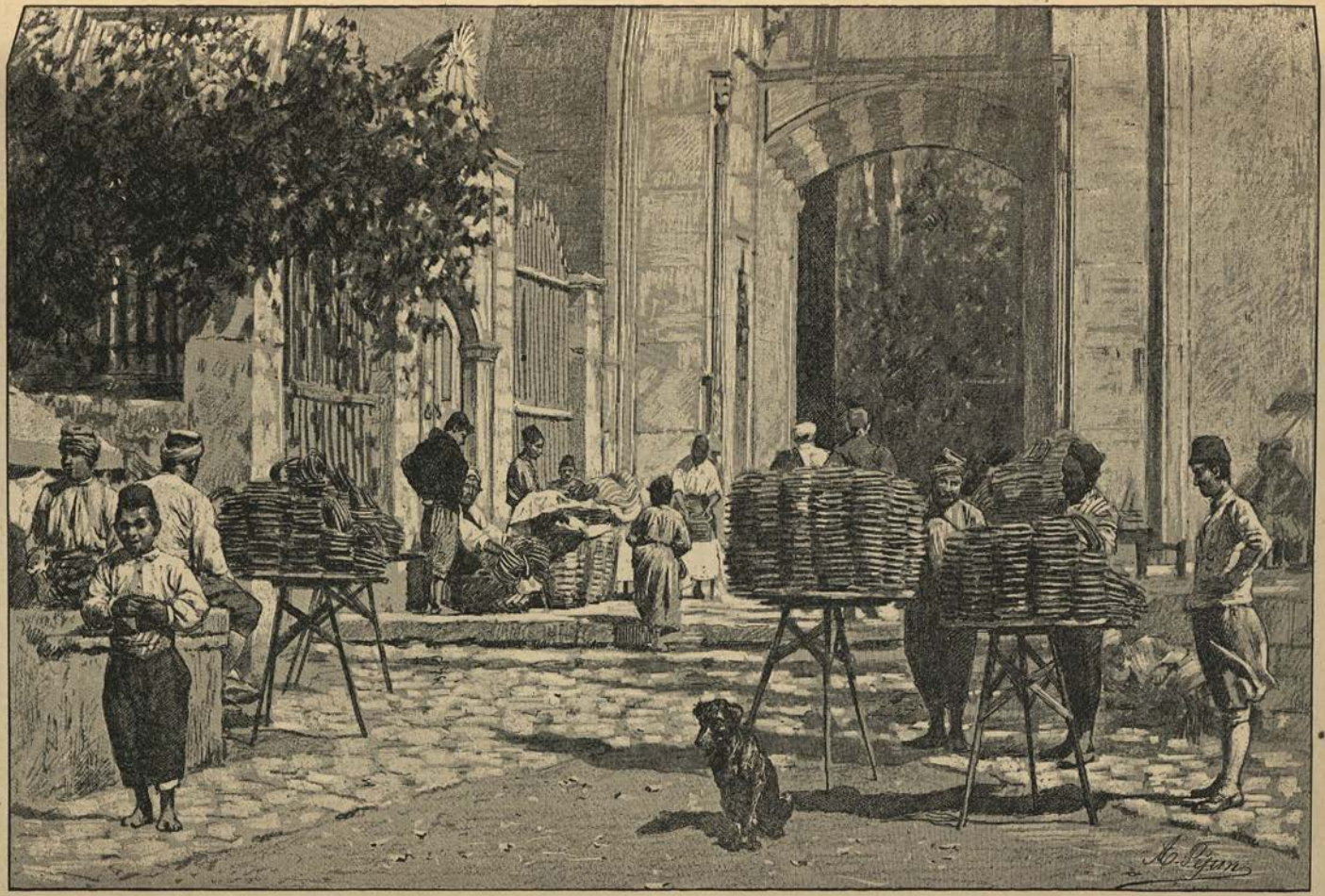
wedged in with their luggage, which is but scanty. Some of them carry a half-filled knapsack ; others have all their belongings tied up in a handkerchief, while their provisions consist of wheaten cakes, not bigger than the palm of the hand, and onions, the green stalks of which they seem to enjoy very much. Upon the deck are a number of cavalry soldiers and their horses, bound for Constantinople. When the boats make off from the side of the vessel, the Arabs utter discordant cries of adieu, raising their hands to heaven, placing them upon their mouth, pressing them to their heart, and gesticulating like lunatics ; as each boat puts off,

there is a fresh outburst of groans, and the tumult does not subside until all the white burnouses are seen to be safe on the quay.

The remainder are crouched patiently beside their horses; the anchor is weighed, and the vessel, carrying the British colours, whistles and steams off with these Asiatics, who will be hastily initiated into the first principles of warfare before the conference is ended or the Greeks have invaded the peninsula with a courage derived from Leonidas of Lacedemonia.

We start in dull weather, and heavy clouds are passing over from Europe to Troas; in other words, the wind is blowing from the north. First we pass the fort of Dardanelles, with its guns pointed upon the strait, the passage of which is forbidden to all vessels at night. To the left is Gallipoli, which, with its white minarets, rises story above story close to the cliffs, great blocks of which are constantly slipping down into the sea. The wind brings us the strident notes of some trumpet practice. So we enter the Sea of Marmora, navigating, as we are told, in neutral waters, *à propos* of which we noticed a touching exchange of sympathies between the passengers. There was a Greek who did not like the Turks; a Genoese who liked neither the Greeks nor the Armenians; an Armenian who did not like the Greeks, the Armenians, or the Turks; Turks who did not say anything against anybody, and more than one Frenchman on board who shook them heartily by the hand. And we are told that we are all brothers!

We reached Constantinople in the rain, and it was no easy matter for our vessel to get a berth in the port, which was crowded with shipping and traversed by rapid currents. I am not going to attempt a description of Constantinople, which has already been so well done. Moreover, the landscape as we saw it, between two snowstorms, was not well lighted up, as a painter would say. It is true that we got a few sunbeams, which made the Golden Horn,



A STREET CORNER AT CONSTANTINOPLE.

Stamboul, Pera, and Galata to sparkle, but the magic spectacle scarcely lasted a moment.

We passed most of the time at our disposal wandering about the picturesque streets of Stamboul and exploring the bazaars. We noticed there strong men carrying enormous loads which bent them to the very earth. They would stop now and again and lean up against the wall to catch breath, then going painfully on their way, slipping upon the wet pavement, clogged by the thick mud, the sweat pouring from their foreheads, and yet, as soon as they had got rid of one load, going back to fetch another. There was no sign of discouragement to be read upon their placid faces, and they had in their eyes the same resigned and fixed look that may be seen in the eyes of the oxen yoked to heavy cars. They were very thin, and most of them spoke in Turkish. Other men, fat and well-liking, seated at ease in the shops, watched, chibook in mouth, these beasts of burden go by; some of them conversing in all kinds of languages; the majority with hooked noses, knit eyebrows, and sallow complexions. The first feed upon onions, cucumbers, rice, bread, and water; they live and die poor. The others are the foreign dealers, who have a well-spread table and grow rich. Eager to amass wealth, they lead a life of uneasiness and feverish agitation. They are unanimous in admitting that the Turks are honourable and trustworthy people, full of energy for work when they are sure of being paid. This is, in brief, typical of all Turkey.

Are we as much entitled as we fancy to reproach with lack of initiative, idleness, and sloth these Turks, who work to pay the debts of extravagant sultans, whom the tax-gatherers would not leave enough to live upon were it not that the raias must be kept alive to supply the treasury of the European bankers? If the bankers are justified in demanding repayment of the sums they have advanced, are the raias of Asia Minor to be blamed

if they are content to live from hand to mouth? Have we not ourselves experienced lassitude of the same kind, less than a century ago? Can we blame a man for not caring to cultivate a field, the produce of which will not repay him for the toil of ploughing and sowing it? We are so in the habit of "letting the Turk have it" that I feel almost compelled to apologize for having in some measure spoken in his defence.

We leave Constantinople at daybreak. The clouds have cleared, and the city stands out in the sunlight. We pass in front of palaces reflected in the water, and rising upon the shores of Stamboul like screens put to hide some dirty object, like a rich and gorgeous mantle covering rags. The sun gives a smile to all this, but it is the feigned smile of sorrow. We indulge in these metaphors as we follow the windings of the Bosphorus, with its well-wooded shores, where the cypress and the pine tree form a mass of verdure around the palaces and villas of the rich. The channel winds about, so that one imagines one's self to be first in one lake and then in another. Right and left, we see villas and palaces, meeting steamers which emit guttural cries, and barks with sails swelling like the wings of white swans, and long boats with many oarsmen gliding through the water like a spider moving its legs by automatic short strokes. Then there are the ruins of fortresses, the white tents of the soldiers, and retrenchments above which the cannon stretch their long headless necks. As we emerge from the Bosphorus we can feel the swell of the Black Sea, angry and agitated, lashing the shore with its waves. We make eastward, and the continent seems to open out to our left, and then the coast is lost in mist to our stern. Upon our right is the land of Asia Minor, parallel with which we are steaming, with undulating mountains of no great height skirting the shore, but here and there a snowy peak behind them piercing the clouds. We have some fresh passengers on deck—shepherds

A SAMSUN SHEPHERD.

who have brought flocks of sheep to Constantinople, and who are going back to Samsun with their master, a big Turk with a heavy drooping moustache. They have with them enormous long-haired dogs, very surly-looking, and always ready to show their wolfish fangs. The young man who has them in hand looks like a brigand, with the arms in his belt, his kindjal, and his pistol. There is nothing of the *opéra comique* about him as he calls his dogs to order. He is a handsome, well set-up young fellow, dressed in grey frieze, with a yellow handkerchief rolled like a turban around his determined-looking head. His face is broad and bony, with a hooked nose coming out between two prominent cheek-bones, and when he raises his eyelids, which he keeps constantly lowered over his black eyes, he has the look of some startled wild beast. Upon questioning his father, an old man with a white beard, he tells us: "We live two days' journey from Samsun, but we only remain there during the winter. As soon as there is any grass, we wander with our flocks over the plains, and then on the mountains."

Upon the deck there are some Turks, who either sleep or gossip as they lie curled up amid their garments. They spend their time with apparent satisfaction in playing together like children, or relating stories to one another. Their meals, which are very frequent, always consist of bread, onions, and water. They seem quite happy.

Persians going to Trebizond with a small cargo of English cotton goods form a bivouac to themselves. They are well-to-do, and have brought plenty of provisions with them. They keep offering one another cups of tea, and hand them with a great deal of smiling and bowing all round. The ghalyan is kept constantly alight, and passed round, each person to whom it is handed drawing a few whiffs and handing it on to his neighbour, taking care, as he does so, to display his fingers covered with

jewelled rings. A young merchant, whose eyes are fringed with antimony, with a very languishing look about him, seems to be the object of general consideration. He plays upon a guitar after the manner of his country, nodding his head very expressively.

One of the officers of the ship observes to us that these Turks are very uncivilized.

We ask him why, and he says because they are such fanatics. This answer does not satisfy us.

DECK PASSENGERS.

The ship's pantryman says, when the officer has moved away, "The reason is a very simple one; they have so few wants."

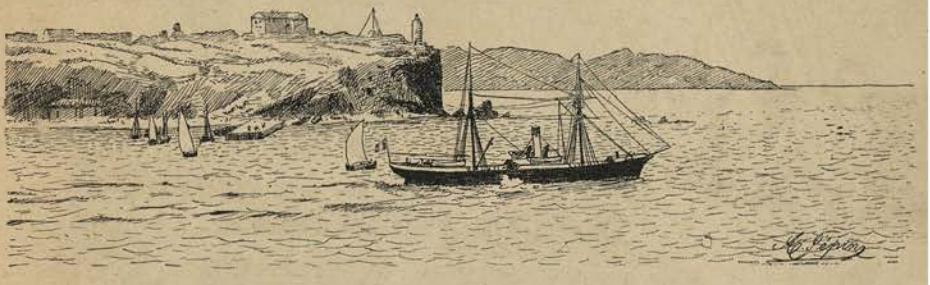
He looks at the matter from another point of view, and to our mind he is right. Yes, a barely civilized people is one which has few wants; a more civilized people has more wants, and so on.

We shall soon get in sight of the lowlands of Samsun, so dreaded by navigators, if only the rain stops. The clouds break, and one can just catch a glimpse of something at the foot of the forests, the trees of which seem to have their roots in the water. It is but the line of a floating mass, and then we see in succession

the lighthouse and the white cottage of the keeper. But the difference of level between the sea and the continent is so slight, the land lies so low, that, even when one gets nearer, it looks rather like a floating mass than solid soil.

The next day we reach Trebizond in fine weather.

The sun is shining, and the bells of the Greek church ring out cheerful sounds which put us upon good terms with ourselves. We climb with brisk steps the steep streets of Trebizond, where we are brought to a stop now and again by Herculean Hammales carrying between four of them a heavy load of sugar. The weight must be enormous, and I know of no one but Turks capable of such a task. The town is fairly clean, and it even has



THE CAPE OF TREBIZOND.

a square, around which are a number of native *cafés*. We remark that there are a great many weavers in the bazaar. The population and aspect of the city remind us both of Auvergne and Aragon, and one view of it reminded us of the French town of Épinal.

When on the bridge, the view to the left is a purely Eastern one—a ruined fortress with crenulated towers standing between it and the sea, the blue waters of which may be seen through its battlements. The route which, upon the other side of the bridge, winds along the heights to the east, leads direct to Teheran, and it is the route for the caravans, several of which we see starting. We meet a number of men in dark costumes and sandals, wearing

light breeches and jackets, with black bachliks made of fine wool and a narrow silver braid. They have a very energetic and commanding air, and we are told that they are Kurds.

We next go to the workshop of a Turkish smith near the bazaar, who is noted for making cash-boxes which he fits with very ingenious locks. He tells us that he sells a great many,

TURKISH PORTERS AT TREBIZOND.

doubtless because there are so many thieves in the country. The master of the establishment, who receives us with the usual affability of the Turks, is about sixty years of age and very intelligent. He has four sons who execute all the finer work. The eldest has worked at Constantinople with Europeans, and he shows us some English illustrated catalogues of machinery. We see some of this machinery in the workshop. They wanted to buy some in France, having seen a model which they liked, but they could not do so, as the manufacturer to whom they wrote did not take the trouble to answer. I was shown his name and

prospectus. Our intelligent fellow-countryman no doubt expected that this worthy Turk, who is quite solvent and enjoys a very good character, would come to Paris and fetch the machine he wanted. The eldest son would very much like to go and see the French workshops, for he has formed a very high idea of our country from what he heard about it from a Marseilles mechanic at Constantinople, but he has not the small capital required, and he is resigned to spend the rest of his days at Trebizond without satisfying his desire to gain instruction.

ANCIENT FORTRESS AT TREBIZOND.

Having drunk the small cup of coffee which the Turks never fail to offer their guests, we returned on board, carrying away with us a very pleasant impression of our visit. We had found in these people tenacity, initiative, and common sense, which is equivalent to saying that all they wanted to make a large fortune was a favourable opening.

In the course of the day, our ship discharged a large quantity of sugar from Marseilles; coffee from the same place, which may

be taken as a proof that one must go to Constantinople to taste it good; blacking from Lyons; nails from Paris, and bales of English cotton taken on board at Constantinople; these latter being hooped with iron, and of such a weight that two cannot be placed on a beast of burden.

We start at nightfall, and the petroleum lamps of the inhabitants, dotted over the town, built like an amphitheatre, shine like so many sparks in the flanks of some dark mass of rock. Then they all disappear in the deep darkness. We remain on deck with our eyes fixed upon the revolving light of the port, which seems to be ever dying out and flaming up again, just as a watchman overwhelmed with fatigue falls nearly asleep and closes his eyes, only to open them wide again at the call of duty, for the salvation of those afloat.

Upon the morning of March 8th, we get a dim view of Batum, at the foot of wooded hills rising the one above the other, the loftiest lost in the mist. The town is not picturesque like Trebizond; for it is not spread over an amphitheatre of hills as one comes upon it from the sea, all that one can see being the front of its houses built in regular order, as befits a modern town.

The first thing we see is the top of the masts, rising above the sombre quadrilateral of the fortress which commands the entrance to the port, and then the old Turkish town in the background, to the left. As we get nearer, we can clearly make out the bodies of soldiers, with their pickaxes and barrows, busily engaged upon making an embankment. But just then we put about to the right and enter the port, where the vessels are crowded together in a very narrow piece of water.

There are ships of every trading nationality in Europe—Russian, French, English, and Austrian steamers, sailing vessels from Italy, Russia, Turkey, and Greece, which come to fetch the petroleum from Baku.

And what an endless number of casks, some lying in rows upon the quay, others being rolled along it, while others, again, are being raised or lowered by the cranes and disappear in the capacious holds of the vessels. The boats which put off from the shore are filled with them, and the carts passing through the streets carry a full load. Some are full and others empty, but they have all held at one time or another the *naphtha*, as the Russians call petroleum, the smell of which is abominable. The planks of the vessels, the sailors' clothes, the land, the very sea, are impregnated with it. There is a sort of oily coating which undulates upon the surface of the sea with the bluish tints of damaskeened work.

To the north-east, the hovels of the Turkish village, with their blackened façades, seem deserted. The new town, which is full of life and commercial activity, appears to be disdainfully turning its back to the old town, for it is spreading in a westerly direction. It is upon this side of the town that are to be found the railway stations, the shops, the warehouses, the agencies of the different companies, and the countless *doukanes* (taverns) in which men of all nations come to drink together. The appetite for gain has not been long in making Batum a cosmopolitan town.

What has made the fortune of this small town, which was quite an insignificant place a few years back?

Simply the fact of its having become Russian. In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, and while the Black Sea possesses very few ports, this small place happened to have one—not a very large or good one, but still a port. Whereas Poti, the neighbouring town, the terminus of the Caucasian railway, which has a bar often rendering the port inaccessible for weeks together, was naturally destined to be abandoned as soon as a branch railway to Batum enabled the merchants and traders of the Caucasus to receive and deliver their goods there. If I add

that Poti is very unhealthy, and Batum rather less so, you will understand why the one is decaying and the other flourishing.

Batum is very animated, and the population goes in for plenty of amusement, as is often the case with people who are making, or who think they are going to make, their fortune.

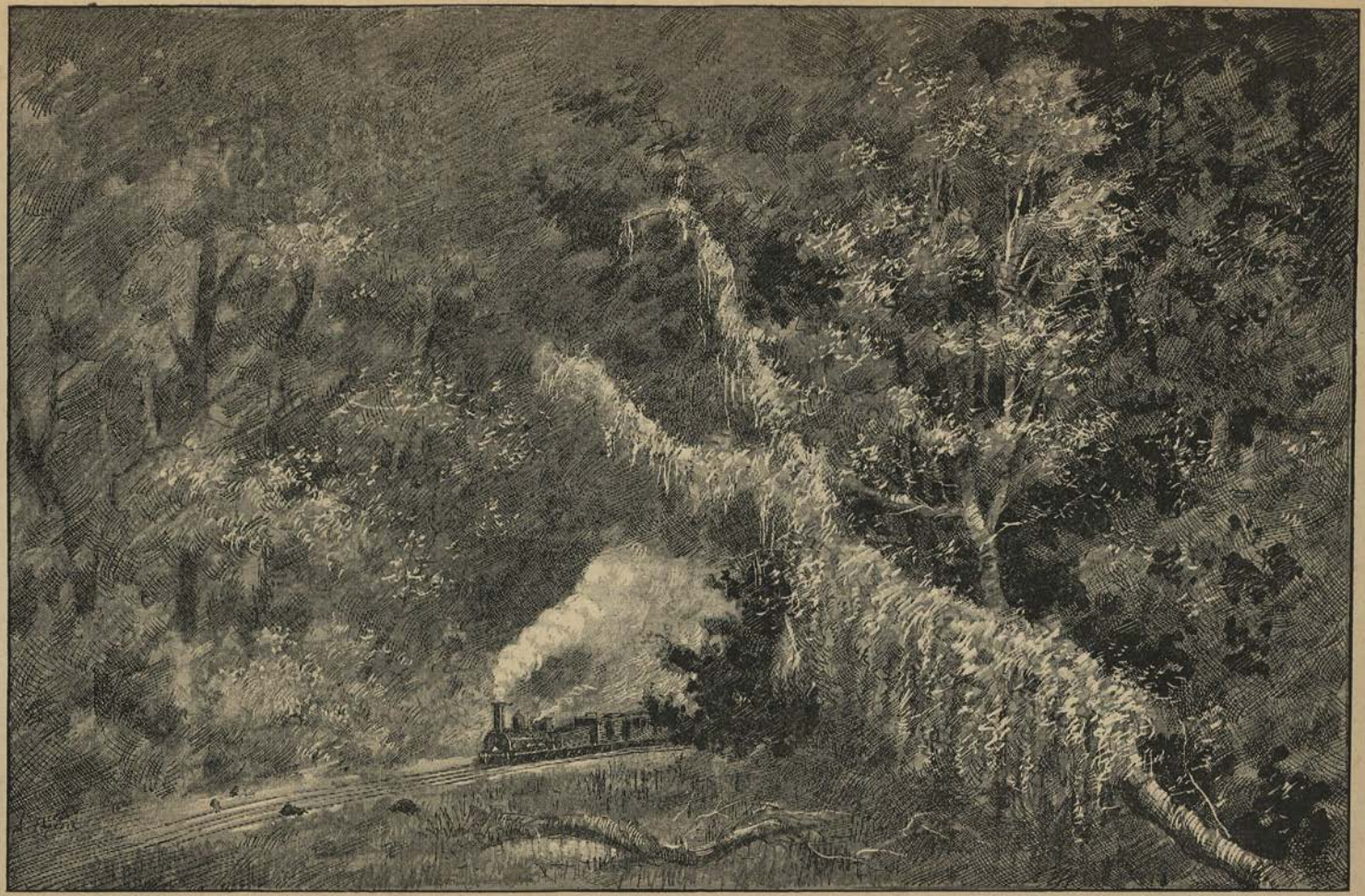
We remained in the town just long enough to receive a visit from the Custom House officers, who were remorseless in their examination, making us pay for all our instruments, and even for a few sticks of chalk. Our boxes were unpacked with much less care than they had been packed.

Upon the 10th of March, we took the train for Tiflis, starting half an hour late, in accordance with what, it appears, is the general custom. The forcing of a motley crowd into the carriage gives rise to something like a riot, and the nonchalance of a stout colonel sauntering up to the train with a cigarette in his mouth, after the bell had rung three times, formed a striking contrast with the agitation and excitement of the Caucasians.

The line skirts the sea for a little way, and we remained for some time at the window, looking at the *Anatolie* which had been decked with flags in our honour by Captain Boschell, the French standard flying from the masthead. Then we entered the virgin forest, and lost sight both of sea and flag.

What a tangle of trees we passed through, nearly all of them intertwined with creepers, and in many places we saw growing out of the dead trunks lying on the ground vigorous young trees thriving upon the mouldering remains of their ancestors. Upright oaks and hornbeams rose erect over the death and the resurrection at their feet, standing firmly upon their roots which were out of the ground. All these trees formed an inextricable thicket, and in some of the densest parts we saw the wild boars feeding in perfect security.

Here and there, thatch-roofed huts were to be seen in the



LEAVING BATUM.

glades, while tracts of ground were covered with Indian corn, growing around trunks which it had not been thought worth while to root up. Moreover, as there was no lack of wood, it was wasted as much as water is in countries like France and England. The huts are built upon four trunks of trees placed just as they had fallen. In some places, the forest had been cleared by setting it on fire, and the ground around the blackened trunks of the trees had been cultivated.

As we get nearer Rion, there is less forest, and gradually

A CLEARING IN THE FOREST.

we come out upon a bare plain, with mountains tipped with snow upon either side. There were a number of pigs to be seen near all the stations, some of them black and just like domesticated wild boars. They often got under the train while it was in the station, not moving till the bell had been rung for the third time.

While the train was stopping, we noticed many passengers and spectators walking up and down the platform in very picturesque costumes, with any number of bourkas and bearskins, cartridge-cases of enamelled silver, kindjals in brilliant sheaths richly gilded,

the carriers of them looking very proud, while even the wearers of rags bore themselves with no little swagger.

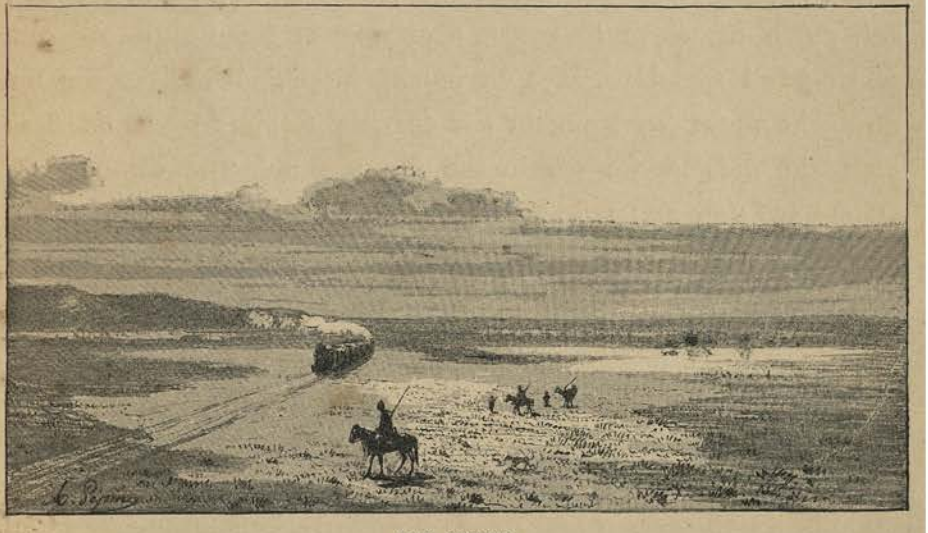
Just before reaching Rion the valley becomes narrower, and we ascend the incline slowly with the aid of a second engine, so that we have time to get a good view of this picturesque route.

In one direction and another we see a crumbling tower standing out like a sentry; a village perched upon some rock like an eagle's nest, a castle in ruins, men on foot shod in sandals, marching with long paces behind their heavily loaded horses, horsemen fully armed for war riding along the river's bank upon lean but high-couraged steeds, a grave-looking shepherd, with his chin leaning upon his staff, enwrapped in thought amid his goats, while the numberless pigs with their long bristles are too busy feeding to bestow a look upon us. Vehicles, with very low wheels, drawn by small oxen, descend the hills, and as the front part touches the ground, they are a sort of a cross between a sledge and a cart. They are used for the carriage of timber and fragments of rock.

We still continue to ascend, and the forests reappear, with snow lying in the hollows. We twist and turn about, go through many tunnels and cross the boiling, bubbling, noisy and impetuous river at least twenty times. Azaleas and rhododendrons are to be seen nearly all along the route. Another engine helps to push us from behind, and at last we reach the watershed about sunset. Here we are confronted by a splendid piece of Alpine scenery, and at night we descend to Tiflis, skirting the Kur, which is a large stream even when we first see it.

We remained at Tiflis until we had received from St. Petersburg some papers which were intended to facilitate our entrance into the Transcaspian provinces. Upon the 20th of March, all our papers being in proper order and the indispensable purchases made, we left Tiflis, and, having been so lucky as to meet M. de

Balloy, the French Minister at Teheran, who was returning to his post with his wife, we obtained his permission to let our baggage go on with his. The baggage is to be sent by rail to Baku, by sea to Reshd, and by mules to Teheran, where we are to meet it. This enables us to go to Reshd overland. We are urged not to do so, being assured that we shall have to traverse a land of robbers who live in impenetrable forests; that we shall find nothing but rough footpaths, and that there are no inns or resting-places on the road. But the country is very little known, and as



THE STEPPE.

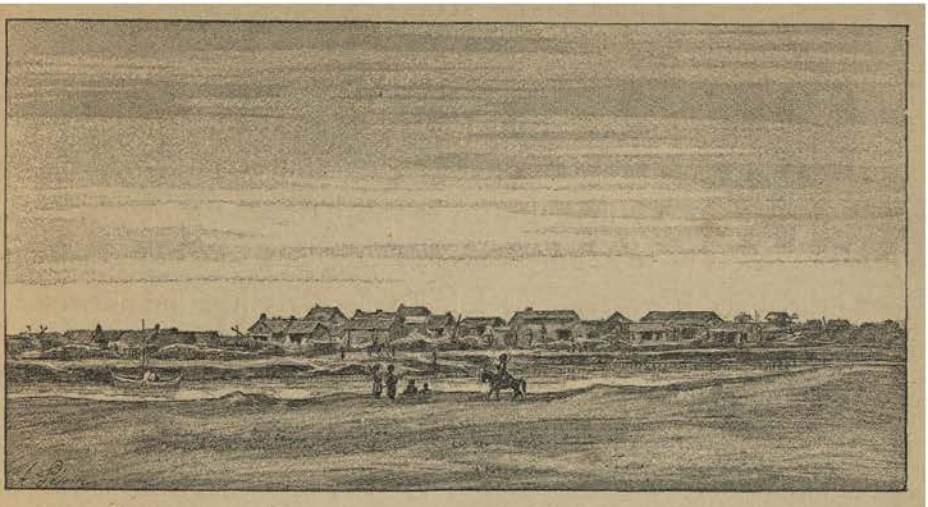
we have plenty of time before us, we take the opportunity of seeing some very interesting scenery. We only take with us what is strictly necessary, enough to load two horses, and our arms.

Having said good-bye to our friends in Tiflis, we join the train and gradually ascend the illuminated valley of the Kur.

The next morning, we wake up and find ourselves once more in the familiar steppe. To the left are the undulating grey mountains; while to the right, as well as in front of us and behind us, the

plain stretches as far as the horizon. Horsemen are dotted about here and there, while sheep and camels can be dimly made out standing around black specks near the surface of the ground, which are tents. The day grows, the sun shines out, the mountains are radiant with a thousand hues, and the illuminated steppe becomes full of animation. The pools glitter in the sunlight, and the transformation scene has been a very rapid and complete one. But the living images which we fancy that we can touch with the finger retreat before us; and at the approach of the engine the water seems to evaporate. We look behind us, and again we seem to see it sparkling in the light. We are passing full speed through an immense mirage. There can be no doubt about our being in the deceitful steppe; while, to complete the illusion, we see in the distance immense columns of smoke twisting and twirling like some umbelliferous plant upon a crooked stalk.

A GAZELLE.



SALIANE.

CHAPTER II.

FROM TIFLIS TO RESHD.

On wheels—Saliane—Native types—Rain and its effects—Sectaries—The land of mud—Upon the sea-shore—More virgin forests—On the Persian frontier—The population; its mode of living and idleness—Feudalism—Scenes of feudal life—Scenery in the Talich country; dwellings, custom, education, serfage, music and medicine.

In the afternoon we leave the train at Hadji Cabul, the station for which is in the middle of the steppe. We are in the Tartar country, the population of which is Turkish. This side of the Caspian Sea is very like the other. The types, however, differ, for on this side the mixture of Caucasian and Persian blood is very distinct, and the men are tall, with fine features and straight noses. You can see that a short and stunted race of men has been fined down by crossing with an elegant and sinewy race.

We send to the posting-house to order horses, and after a meal, we take our seats upon numerous bundles of hay and start

off to the music of the bells on the collars of the horses, which are excellent and go a very good pace. The perikladnaïa in which we are taking our ease is as comfortable as it was when we tried it at the time of our first visit; it is still devoid of springs. The roads have got their full allowance of ruts, and some of the jolts are heart-breaking. But our sojourn in Paris has not deprived us of all agility, and so we can keep our balance and still watch the glorious sunset.

The "open letters," it appears, entitle us to an escort, which is quite useless, and we are accompanied by three horsemen, armed with a sword and a gun. They gallop alongside of us, and from time to time treat us to the spectacle of a "djiguitovka," a Turkish word, which is equivalent to cutting figures on horseback.

Reaching Saliane on the 22nd of March, and finding that rain threatened, we purchase some felt manufactured by the Tartars. It is not equal to that made by the Khirgiz people. With this felt we covered our two large flasks. Saliane is built along a bend of the Kur. The wooden houses are built around large squares. The bulk of the population is Tartar, though there are a good many Persians, Armenians, and Russians. They nearly all make their living by fishing for sturgeon, with which the river abounds, and which are smoked and exported.

The Mussulman bazaar is closed, and we see only a few fruit-sellers seated under their straw shelters, and vendors of salt brought, as we are told, from Khiva and the Turkoman country. In the shops kept by Armenians or Russians, cotton stuffs and earthenware goods from Russia, both of inferior make, are offered for sale. This is the Mahometan New Year's Day, and that is why the bazaar is closed. The inhabitants are walking about arrayed in their best clothes. The tight-fitting tcherkeskas, with their long skirts, are not so often to be seen; they are worn shorter and in many cases open at the breast, not coming lower

A YOUNG TARTAR ON A PONY.

than the knee. Upon the other hand, the sheepskin headdress is higher and broader at the top. The people are shod differently, too, for instead of wearing high boots, they have a sort of broad slipper, curling up at the toe, with a wooden heel coming in under the hollow of the foot, so that the heel projects. The feet are bare or encased in woollen socks, many of which have coloured figures on them. It is necessary to acquire the habit of wearing these shoes, for, as one of my friends observed, they give one the sensation of walking upon potatoes.

Upon the occasion of this great festival of the *Nourouz* (New Year), the Shiite Mahometans dye themselves with henna; nearly all their hands, beards, and hair being flaming red. There are a great many people in the streets, and there is an air of joy and gaiety among them all.

It was with the greatest difficulty that we induced a native saddler to sew the felt around our flasks. He was very anxious to take part in the rejoicings, but as soon as we offered him a good sum for his work, he sat down with a smiling face, and when we came back to the posting-house for our meal, he had finished. We determine to go and sleep at Tisiakent, which is only a village. The steppe commences near the Kur, and at rare intervals we see hamlets with houses surrounded by a great many hedges. There is no lack of land, but the inhabitants are very few, though there is no fear of drought, not at least this year, for rain has been falling in torrents.

The rain continues to fall when we start the next day (March 23rd), and continues all along the route. This is why the mud-built houses have steep thatched roofs, in order that the water may run off very quickly. This is an indispensable precaution wherever rain is frequent. These roofs lend a singular appearance to the landscape, which reminds me of the French Bocage (a district in Brittany), though I do not for a moment want to

argue that there is any similitude of race or character. It is simply due to the laws of gravity and the desire to keep dry.

Here we are in a country where the Turkish language is spoken, but at Andreieff, Prichip, and the succeeding stations, we enter quite another world. It is only in the gigantic empire of the Czars that one comes upon such surprises as this. Here we see houses constructed after the Russian fashion, with straight streets, fields carefully cultivated, green fields with herds of cattle, and sturdy Russian horses. This country is inhabited by the descendants of sectaries named Malakanes. I question our Tartar postilion as to why these Russians had left their country. His reply was, "Because they were required to make the sign of the cross three times, and they would only make it once."

The country is very fertile, but unhealthy; the roads are abominable, but our excellent teams pull us out of this sea of mud, which tells us that we are getting into the Guilan. Guilan means the "land of mud," and very appropriately is it named. At Andreieff, a good woman asks us for medical advice. She is old, eaten up with fever, and very weak. To use her own phrase—she feels death coming.

"There is a great deal of fever in the country," we observe.

"A great deal. Many people die of it."

"Why do you remain here?"

"I was born here, and the land is very rich."

Through habit, man lives in climates which are fatal to him, and in poverty; he cannot even console himself with the thought that the soil is good, and illness, combined with the atmosphere in which he moves, takes from him all idea or ambition of improving his condition.

From Prichip, a village of wealthy Malakanes, we make our way across country, but we should not have got very far had it not been for our excellent horses. What mud! What jolting!

IN THE MUD.

What ups and downs! The postilion is constantly losing his seat and falling back on to his horse's quarters. He only laughs, and whips them on the more. All the way to Kizil-Agatch we jump rather than drive. We come to some ponds, and on the right we see mountains covered with forests. We are descending towards the Caspian, whence comes this very trying rain.

We leave Kizil-Agatch in better weather, the rain having stopped, though the sky is still dark, and there is a likelihood of fresh storms. The mud is still very deep. To our left is the plain, to our right mountains covered with forests and obscured by the mist, and in front the gaping void of the Caspian Sea. We drive along past pools which swarm with water-fowl, including ducks, teal, herons, cormorants, etc., with eagles swooping overhead. Then we go through some gorse, where there are plenty of foxes. We still continue going downhill towards the sea, through lowlands which are the home of fever.

Then we come to some sands, which tell us that the station is not far off—as it is named Kum, which means sand—nor the sea either for the matter of that. The posting-house is in the middle of a rose bank, at the edge of a small bay, where we see fishermen bringing live fish to shore and taking on board boxes of smoked fish.

From Kumbachi we go to Lenkoran by a sandy road. We are in full view of the open sea, with the extremity of the Bay of Kizil-Agatch to the north, while the steamer from Baku is visible in the distance when we enter Lenkoran, with its houses all built along the shore. There are a great many fishing-boats about, but the bazaar is closed, as the holiday is still being observed, and the Tartars, all dyed with henna, are sauntering about in their best attire.

Lenkoran is only famous for the fever engendered by the marshes to the west of the town.

We get out at the posting-house, which is the last on Russian territory, for further on there are only pathways, and we shall have to continue our journey on horseback. We pay our respects to the chief of the district, who places at our disposal one of his policemen who speaks Russian and Turkish. He promises to bring us the next day a man who will supply us with as many horses as we want. The interpreter is an asthmatic Mussulman, wearing the tcherkeska with much grace. He attributes his illness, which he treats sometimes with talismans, sometimes with indifference, to the climate.

LENKORAN.

He comes to us on the 25th of March, about eight in the evening, with a very small Tartar, wearing a very high caftan, and very obsequious. He warmly recommends him, and overloads him with praise. The Tartar listens with a very demure air, and whenever I look at him, he makes a profound bow and has his hands crossed over his stomach.

"You can put all confidence in him," said the police officer; "he is an honest man, well known all along the route you are travelling, and universally respected. As a proof that I am not deceiving you, I may add that he is allowed to go into the women's rooms."

"Surely not?"

"Yes, into the women's rooms. Moreover, he is rich, and has a fine house at Lenkoran. He is the most honest man of my acquaintance," etc.

How could one fail to be satisfied with so rare a jewel? And thereupon we enter into a discussion upon the subject of horses, coming to an agreement after an hour of feints, attacks, retorts, and bargaining. At noon, we make a start with five horses, three for riding and two for carrying baggage. We purchase a few

TARTAR HOUSES AND DRESSES.

provisions in the bazaar, three bourkas, and three whips. We hurriedly write three letters which we take to the last post-office, where we see a new portrait of the new Czar in an old frame.

About noon, the little Tartar arrives in the company of three or four lanky fellows, their hands red with henna, with long faces like the Persians, who make us a profound bow and look very lugubrious.

"These are the men who are to accompany me," observed the little Tartar.

After we have made their acquaintance, they stand aside, in a very respectful attitude.

"You can load the baggage, and then we will start."

All four bow in token of assent, whereupon the little Tartar remarks in a very insinuating tone—

"But that will be rather difficult, for we have only two horses ready. The others will not be so till this evening."

"Why this delay?"

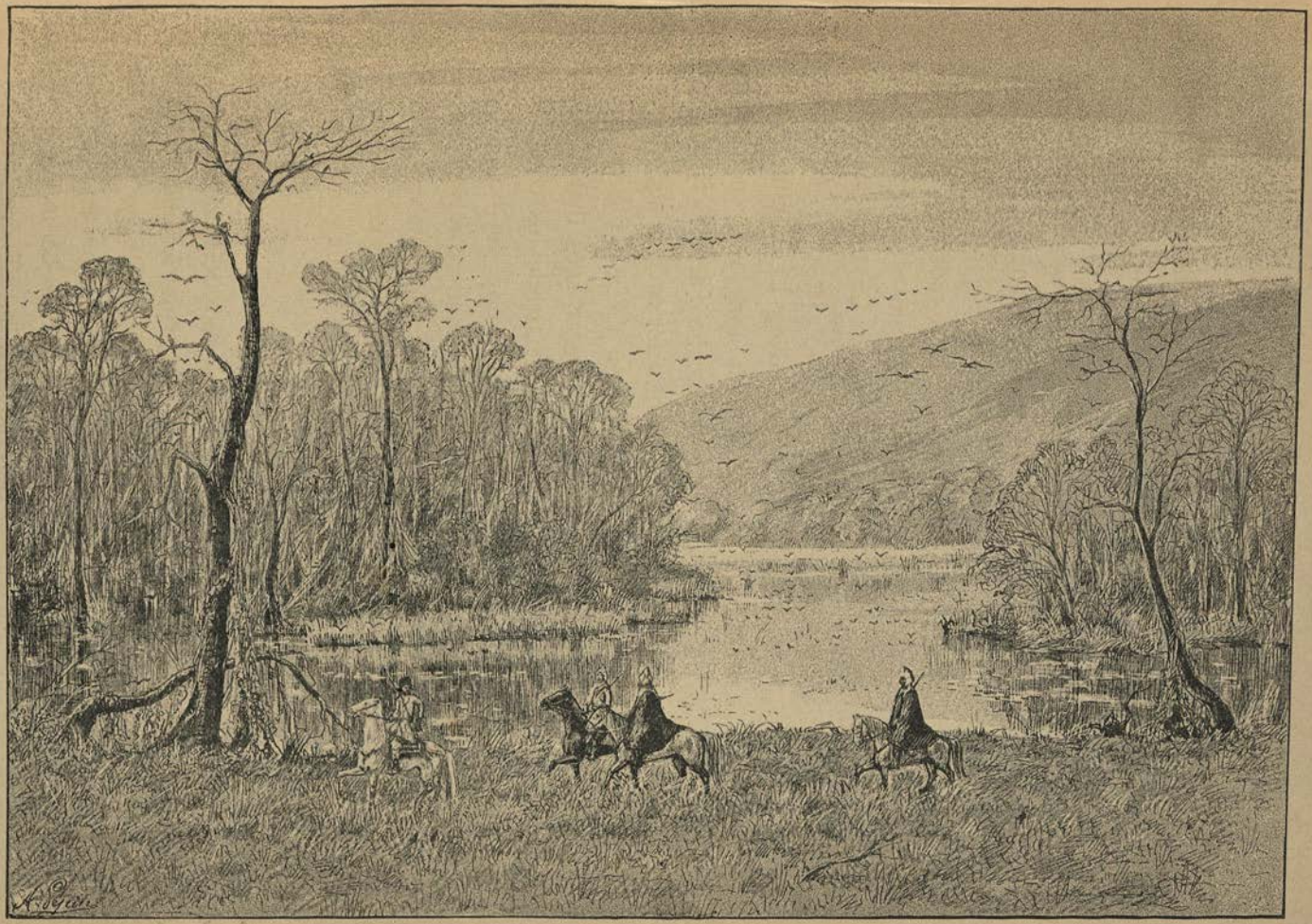
"They are not shod. By daybreak to-morrow, everything will be in readiness, and we shall reach Astara about noon. And if it is not done as I have said, you can cut off this ear, and the other one too. Vallah!"

As we know that the road, after leaving Lenkoran, is either sandy or muddy, and that at no part is it stony, we conclude that the horses do not want shoeing, and that the Tartar is lying.

"Will you pay to-morrow ten roubles for each horse not shod, and then I will believe that the reason you allege is the real one?"

The little Tartar, with his tall head-gear, sees that I do not take him on trust, and he begins to smile, while his companions laugh outright. In reality, they want to enjoy the holiday, and they eventually admit it is so, saying, "To-morrow will be less holiday, and then all will be for the best." We give way to their wish; because there is no help for it, and they take themselves off, after making a profound obeisance, laughing and joking among themselves.

This little incident is a warning to us that the journey has begun in earnest, for here is an unexpected delay. When one starts, it is advisable to say to one's self that not a minute shall be lost on the way, just as if one had made a bet to go round the world in eighty days, and, in the course of the journey, one finds that it is necessary to have patience and not be in more of a hurry than if one had eighty years to do it in. There is no good



IN THE LENKORAN MARSHES.

in making a fuss, either; for those who are passionate learn to be calm and become astonished at the easy way in which they take matters, while persons usually calm will find it impossible to keep their temper. One may conclude from this that travel forms the mind and character to some extent.

We take advantage of the leisure which the commencement of the Mussulman year enforces on us to purchase some little luxuries, such as Caucasus raisins and dried apricots from Mazendéran.

After that, we go and try our luck in the marshes, but we only get very dirty, and fail to kill a single duck or cormorant. From there we go and get a mouthful of pure air upon the sandy shore of the raging Caspian, which is kind enough to wash all the mud off our boots. Thus man utilizes the forces of nature.

The Tartar had undertaken to be ready before daybreak, but at six o'clock the horses had not arrived. At the last moment, it turned out that six would be required, and not five as it was agreed yesterday. The Tartar laments his hard fate, and his comrades try to make us believe that we have too much luggage, and that six, or even seven horses will be required to carry it. This was the usual comedy, the *dénouement* of it being that we had to pay for an extra horse.

We remind the Tartar that he had offered us one of his ears yesterday if he was late, and that late he was. But he is so obsequious, and praises our goodness in such flattering terms, that we do not deprive him of his ear. We start amid driving rain, and upon leaving Lenkoran, we have to cross a river swollen by the floods. We follow our guide with precaution, for our little horses are up to their chests in water, and we up to our knees.

As our long cloaks are immersed in the water, they form quite a heavy weight upon our shoulders, and we feel as if we were crossing a river of glue, or as if some capricious water-sprite was

pulling us from behind and inviting us to descend with her into her fairy abode. The truth is that we are entangled in our accoutrements, that the stream is rapid, and that if our horses slipped, we should be carried off like so many leaves.

The forest commences on the other side of the river. After floundering about in some sticky mud, we reach the sand on the river bank and follow it as long as we can.

Our horses trot gently along, the water just washing their hoofs, and then all of a sudden they start off and begin to jib, those who are riding in the rear getting quite wet with the water their heels throw up. Upon the summit of the steep bank, the thatch of a Tartar hut may be seen at intervals, and then we come to deep cavities in the bank, and to marshy pools surrounded by virgin forests. We can discern willows, acacias, and elms all bound together by gigantic creepers; the timber caught in the toils of a net formed by the refuse of vegetation.

Here may be seen all the birds of creation. Some of the branches are covered with clusters of cormorants, crows, and magpies; upon the summit of the elms may be seen quantities of vultures and eagles; in the marsh are flamingoes, cranes, spoonbills, and long-legged herons; falcons and stone falcons, with their long claws, are eating the fish which they have caught perched on a branch, or are skimming the surface, with open beaks, and ready to harpoon anything within their reach. Above our heads are flying the swans and the pelicans, all in a line, and with necks like travelling bags. A shot at a duck elicits cries of terror from this tribe of birds, and there is such a concert of croaking, quacking, screeching, and cawing as never was heard. The din quite deafens us, and it is all in vain that the Caspian beats time with her swell, regulated by the north-easter. Then, as the noise faded away, there was nothing to be heard but the hissing of the cormorants, and the gulls chattering like Turkish women at a

well; the pelicans with their protuberant crops had lapsed into silence, and were to be seen winging their flight through the air.

After passing by several woodmen's huts, close to the path we were following, we cross a plain and two streams with ferries; one at Chak-Agatch, and another at Kaladagni, where fishermen were waiting for a return of fine weather, encamped under canvas which had been dipped in tar to make it rain-proof. They were Russians, Cossacks, and Kalmucks, easy of recognition by reason

ON THE SHORE OF THE CASPIAN SEA.

of their Mongol features. They were smoking to pass away the time. The rain, which had stopped for a time, began to come down again in torrents, and the sea was very high. We march away from it in order to shorten our route.

After having crossed several torrents, and floundered out of one morass into another, we reach Astara in pouring rain, at night-fall. We can just see the square brick house with zinc roof of the Customs, and we knock at the door of the next house, where the Merkur and Kavkas Company has its counting-house. Our

arrival had been expected, and we find snug quarters, that is to say, benches to sit upon, and wooden planks to lie full length upon, and a roaring stove to dry our clothes. A dozen eggs and as many glasses of tea apiece soon make us feel ourselves again.

The agent of the company, a very pleasant man, tells us that we shall probably be unable to cross the swollen river to-morrow; but that with a very short spell of fine weather the ferry will be practicable. There is no large boat, nothing but very rickety canoes, hewn out of the trunks of trees.

Our men confirm this view; and they exaggerate the condition of affairs, being in no hurry to start again in such bad weather. They are very disappointed at not being able to go and spend the night in the Persian village on the other side, as they have many acquaintances there.

This part of the country is partially cultivated, and the Tartars grow rice in it. They are, it appears, incredibly lazy, scarcely taking the trouble to till the soil, and lying in the fields while their women-folk are sowing the seed; and when the harvest comes round, rather than reap it themselves, they make over a third to the mountaineers, who come down and do the work. When the time comes for transplanting the rice, the women and children are left to do it, the men going to fish or to sleep, which is their favourite occupation. The Armenian told us that they are too lazy even to steal. One could hardly have thought that laziness could be an incentive to honesty. Though why not, seeing that moralists tell us that all faults have their corresponding virtues!

It is very true that the Tartars are lazy, for we had ocular as well as oral evidence of the fact. They live in miserable mud huts, with thatched roofs, or huts made of reeds with a thin facing of mud; and yet there is plenty of timber to be had close at hand. They are shivering with cold and damp for want of a combustible,

which it would give them so little trouble to procure. It is often the case that wood is dearer at Astara, in sight of splendid forests, than it is at Baku, where it is imported from Persia. They are very badly fed, living chiefly on rice, gherkins, and melons, and yet the soil is rich. They are badly clad and sickly, eaten up by fever; and they have the reputation of being more inclined to anger than tenacity of purpose. They are free with their formidable long knives (kindjals), but they do not care to use the pickaxe. Their temperament is that of a race with high-strung nerves, whose blood has been impoverished by an unwholesome climate.

It is raining when we awake, but not so hard as the day before. Our tcharvadars (muleteers), who are paid by the day, tell us that it is the finger of Providence, that the river is impassable, and that it will be better to wait till to-morrow. To-day, the water would be up to a man's neck; and a horse with a load on his back would be entirely submerged. They add that it is impossible to start, "unless we wish for the death of the Mussulmans." And they swear by their beards that they are honest men. We annul the agreement, and send to hire horses in the Persian village. We intend starting the next day, whatever the weather may be. We have engaged a man named Amman, a former sailor, inspector of works, and fisherman; but at present a smuggler and so forth. He speaks Russian, and is by no means devoid of intelligence. He understands Persian, and can speak it fairly well; while Turkish is his national tongue. So he makes a good interpreter.

The rain stopped for a little during the morning, so we were able to ferry across the river. We had no need to entrust our persons to the herculean Kurd, with his broad, savage face, who with great dexterity guided his *koulasse* (canoe) with a pole. We had more difficulty in getting through the mortar with which the

road through the bazaar leading to the residence of the village chief is made. We find the chief a charming little man, very smartly attired, with white socks, blue trousers, an open black tunic, and an astrachan head-dress. He is extremely polite, very dignified, and very effeminate in his manners; and he has a way of bending his little finger, upon which he wears a turquoise ring which a milliner showing off lace to a customer might envy. After waiting three-quarters of an hour, a guide arrives, and we take leave of him, much, apparently, to his regret. He says, "What a pity that you are leaving. My district is at your orders. I would have executed all your wishes. If I was not expecting one of my superiors, I would accompany you. May God be with you!" and so on.

His residence was a thatched house, at the extremity of a large courtyard, shut in by a reed fence. The entrance was by a low doorway, and the first apartment was the drawing-room, in which the chief sat cross-legged in the midst of his assessors; one of them handing him the pen, another ink, and the third the paper he was to sign.

He had scarcely time to bring himself back into a perpendicular position, after having bent himself double to bow us out, when the rain began to fall again in torrents. What mud, and what a quantity of it! At a distance of about a mile and a half, we came to the somewhat important river of Khodjikara. The horses are unloaded, and the baggage placed in canoes; the horses, having been unsaddled, swim across, while the men undress and get into the water so as to gain time and not pay anything for the ferry. We cross several fever-breeding marshes, and we then skirt the sea for some distance, partly on the sand, partly on the high ground above it.

The rain continues to fall. Our men run along with their bare feet, going faster than our horses, which are but sorry steeds.

At many points the road is intersected by watercourses. To our right a chain of mountains, all about the same height, shut in the horizon with their wooded slopes. At a distance, these mountains seem as if they had been planted with trees which had been regularly trimmed by the hand of man; something like the toys made in Germany for children, only upon a larger scale. In places, the trees are so covered with snow that they look as if their tops had been powdered.

IN A CANOE.

Entering the forest, we reach Visna, where, as our guide informs us, the authority of his chief at Astara ends. He obstinately refuses to go any further, in spite of threats and promises. We request him to take us to the chief of the village, and, after going through marshes, trees, and a sea of mud, we manage at last to reach a glade, where stands a thatch-covered house, with a long gallery, each pillar of which is formed of the trunk of a tree scarcely stripped of its bark. Long-haired wolf dogs greet us with barking which is not by any means friendly, and they

bite our horses in the legs. A few good blows with a stick drive them off, and from the thickets emerge a number of tattered-looking individuals, each with a long pruning-hook in his hand. They have very little clothes of any kind, and they appear more surprised than alarmed at our appearance.

From the door of one of the rooms emerge the heads of women of all ages, with a tribe of children between their legs. In another very large room, grouped around a brazier, are a number of men squatting in a circle.

We ask for the chief. First one man speaks, then another, and then a third; but none of them is the chief. We insist upon seeing him, and at last an aged man thinks fit to leave his place by the fire and come forward. He has a white beard, and is very laconic in speech. We ask him for a guide, and offer to pay for his services. But he will not listen to us, and goes back to warm himself. We threaten him with Chah, a neighbouring chief, but this does not intimidate him, and he declares that he is not afraid of any one. The thirty men around him appear to share his views, and we leave, after having told the old savage that we shall inform the khan how the chief of Visna despises him. If any unpleasant consequences follow, so much the worse for him.

The old man has evidently been impressed by what we have said, for a man soon overtakes us and goes on in front, cutting off with his pruning-hook the branches which came in our way. It appears that we made a blunder in invoking the authority of the Khan of Karganrud, who is hated in this district, which is subject to the Khan of Khevir.

We only got a guide when it was found that we were going to the latter's residence that same evening.

We reach Khevir, in the midst of the partially cleared forest, before nightfall, Rakim-Khan offering us hospitality in one of his houses, which was made cheerful by a bright fire.

We were wet to the skin, and glad to swelter in the heat and smoke. The fire was burning in one of those chimneys peculiar to the country which are not, properly speaking, chimneys at all, inasmuch as the draught is created by the door. The faggots are piled up in an earthen niche, very like those in which the figures of saints are placed, and, when they are alight, a tongue of flame springs up, licks the side of the niche and reaches up above the summit, so that, as there is no fire without smoke, the volume of smoke is such that it compels those who are standing up to sit

KHEVIR.

down, and sometimes those who are seated to lie flat on the floor, this being the case when the pressure of the atmosphere is very great, as on the present occasion. It is in this posture that the khan finds us when he comes to pay us a visit, in the company of his cousin, and has served for us a simple but very delicious meal, consisting of enormous salmon trout, stewed to perfection, rice done in fat, cream, and dried grapes.

Rakim is a man of middle height, with regular features, and brown hair, wearing the astrachan hat of the country, an open tunic with brass buttons, breeches of gray frieze, and leather

abarcas kept in their place, like the "carbatinæ" of antiquity, by thongs of plaited wool. His cousin, a younger man than himself, wears the official blue tunic of the Persians. Both of them have a kindjal in their belts.

Rakim returns us with interest the compliments we pay him, and he informs us that he goes down each winter into his fief to inspect his property, receive his due, hear any complaints, and settle any squabbles. In the winter, he lives up in the mountain. His cousin has spent two years at Teheran, but he found life very dull there, and he has now returned to Khevir.

The khan has difficulties with a neighbour, one of his relatives, who is constantly trying to pick a quarrel with him, and who wishes, to use our servitor's expression, "to buy his land without money." He complains bitterly of his enemy's want of respect, and says that he has just insulted him very much, *à propos* of the New Year, by not coming to pay him the first visit, as, being the younger of the two, it would have been etiquette for him to have done. The serfs of Rakim are being continually ill-treated, and he cannot avoid reprisals. Matters are becoming envenomed, and will end badly.

When the khans send their servitors to each other, these latter are badly received, and the breach becomes wider each day. Rakim knows that we are going to Teheran, where he has an elder brother attached to the shah's household. He would be much obliged if we would tell his brother that the land of Khevir, for a hundred years in his family, is in danger of being lost, and that the intervention of the shah would be of great service.

I asked him why he did not write a letter to this effect, and he told us that his letters were always intercepted before they reached Teheran.

The khan asks us to give him advice as to his eyes and those of several of his attendants, and he then withdraws. To-morrow he is to accompany us to the frontier of his domain. We leave for Karganrud in the morning, with the sun for once condescending to shine. A few men, carrying Peabody rifles and long knives (kindjals), precede us. The khan on horseback, with two running footmen, also goes on in front. They are all well armed, the khan's young cousin having a revolver in his belt. We plunge into the depths of the virgin forest, and the route, by a winding pathway, is a charming one. An hour or two like this, spent amid a beneficent and smiling nature, is enough to compensate for weeks and months of fatigue and disappointment.

We are in a wood of wild pomegranate trees and wild briars, which grow beneath the tall acacias and beeches all covered with creepers, while many other large trees, which have been split in half by thunderstorms and bent to the ground have, like Antæus, shot up afresh from the soil, with renewed vigour, upright and full of life. They are like the peoples whom misfortune only casts down, to raise them up again and rejuvenate them. On the ground, anemones, violets, and Easter daisies are revelling in the sun like us; the moss is getting green, the birds are singing, and all is calm and bright. But, in our enjoyment of being alive, we cannot hear the dull roar of the sea on our left; yet it is very close to us—so close, that through the branches we can catch a glimpse of its foaming waves. The horsemen go in single file through the wood, and they stoop down when the khan, with his knife, has not cut off the prickly branches which threaten to scratch the faces of his guests. There is a succession of ferries, and, as we pass one of them, we see a fisherman land a fine salmon very cleverly by hooking him under the stomach. The khan offers us the fish, as he is master of everything which swims in the water as well as what flies in the air. We refuse the gift;

and the serf continues his fishing, while the lord goes on his way, not a word having been exchanged.

We emerge from the forest and follow the sea-shore, along which millions of shells have been thrown up high and dry. Our horses, as they step upon them, make a clatter with their hoofs like the sound of distant bells ringing a merry peal. We are not the only travellers, for there are long lines of pelicans and swans overhead, but they are flying northward. Each one goes his own way in this world. The khans accompany us as far as the limit of their domains, near a river. Upon the other side we see a reed hut, with armed men outside it.

The khans bid us good-bye, after having alighted from their horses; and Rakim begs us not to forget the commission he gave us for Teheran.

Whereupon, we cross the ferry, and are upon the territory of our late host's enemy. The armed men come to see us across, as their duty is to exact toll from those who enter their master's territory, forming a post of Customs officers, with the faces of brigands. They exchange a few words with our interpreter, and having learned who we were, they salute us respectfully.

About five in the evening, we reach Karganrud by a route which would not be a bad one for horses of rather a better stamp than ours. Horsemen sent by the khan invite us to repair to the "castle," where we are expected. We do not arrive there until it is pitch dark, after a march of two hours through a terrible slough of mud, and after having crossed the river, the bed of which is very broad and covered with rough stones, one of which makes our servant's horse stumble and sends him over its head to take an involuntary bath. We are shown to a bedroom, the walls of which are whitewashed, with recesses to serve as hanging cupboards or wardrobes, while a table and three chairs, of European shape, tell us that the master of the house has been in

contact with the West. We are surrounded by a host of servants, all with the long knife suspended from their sides; and it is with difficulty that we shake ourselves free of their unwelcome attentions. At last they go off to bed, after having announced that the khan will come and pay us a visit in the morning.

He comes, as a matter of fact, almost before we are dressed,

A TALICH MAN-AT-ARMS.

with a numerous suite in attendance. He presents us to his brother-in-law and a cousin who accompany him. He asks us where we are going, and what is the object of our journey; and he is delighted to have the opportunity of getting in a word of French now and then. He even contrives to frame a few rude

phrases, but he scarcely understands the plainest replies. He has recourse to our interpreter, who speaks the Talich Turkish to him. The khan remarks that our man has the accent of the country, and asks him how he comes to be a Russian subject, and whether he is not Talich. He reproaches him with having left his country; and when Amman tells him that he is a native of Ardebil, the khan knits his eyebrows, for he detests the men of that tribe.

The khan is small, thin, and sinewy; he has a head like a vulture, with a long neck, aquiline nose, large black eyes, and bad expression. He smiles a good deal, and displays small, pointed teeth. He is very much master of himself, puts very insidious questions, and replies to ours without any hurry. He is evidently a very suspicious man, with the feline ways of a tiger, and he makes Amman very uncomfortable. Every one who comes near him is afraid of him.

We ask him to breakfast with us, and he replies, "Yes, if you will allow me," with a most obsequious smile. While breakfast is being got ready, he proposes that we should take a walk, and he profits by the opportunity to ply us with questions.

"Why have you no majesty in your country?"

"I don't know."

"You know, but you won't tell me."

"Perhaps because the people will not have one."

"Why will they not have a majesty?"

"Because they prefer to be the majesty themselves."

"That is impossible. There can only be one majesty. I do not understand."

I take good care not to try and explain to him what he does not understand.

"MacMahon is the chief in France."

"No; he is not so any longer. He has been succeeded by Grévy."

"What did Grévy do with MacMahon? Did he turn him out of France?"

"No; they both live in Paris."

This is too much for the khan, who communicates to his brother-in-law the astonishment this statement causes him. It is evident that he does not believe me.

"And MacMahon does nothing? He does not attempt to avenge himself?"

"No."

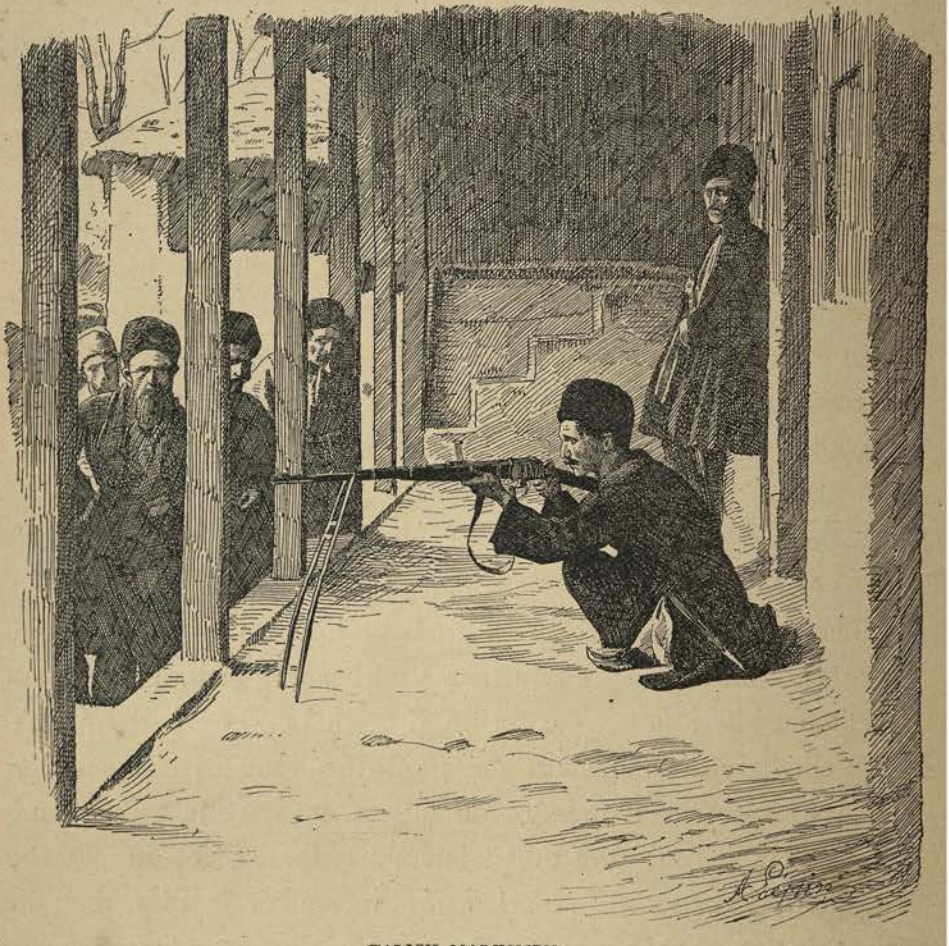
This ends the subject. We have just reached the summit of a hill, some way from our dwelling-place, and to the left we see a large house, which appears to be uninhabited. This is a prison. Lower down, about two hundred yards away, is the residence of the women, consisting of a house with one story and a balcony running round it, under the guard of armed men, This house starts from the riverside, forming a square, with immense stables and a kind of barracks.

Above the hill, to the top of which we have climbed, upon a natural platform from which the sea is visible, the khan is building a brick palace. He will show it to us to-morrow, and will be very pleased if we will take a "likeness" of it.

Followed by a numerous group, preceded and flanked by men with a rifle on the shoulder, we reach the bath by a road carefully laid with flints. Near the door a man with a white turban and swarthy face, with an axe on his shoulder, rises at our approach, bends low and salutes the khan—who waves his hand to him in recognition—and then proceeds to chant in a loud tone the praises of his master, who seems quite to appreciate this. While we are going down the steps into the bath, we can still hear the loud but droning tones of the herald. He is, it appears, an illustrious dervish, and he comes to spend a few days with the khan every winter.

The bath is very clean and well arranged. We compliment the architect on his good taste, and the khan is highly delighted, for it is he who has designed the plans and superintended the works.

We ask the khan why the country is called Talich.



TALICH MARKSMEN.

"It is," he tells us, "in memory of a son of Gengis-Khan, from whom my family descends. We have been masters of the Talich country for four centuries. It was formerly a very large one, but the Russians have taken part of it, and only a small corner is left us."

We ask him if he has resided at Teheran, and he replies in the affirmative, saying, "that it was there that he learned French, and served in the shah's army, and that he had the rank of general, with the duty of supplying four hundred horsemen in case of war."

Above our heads, at a height of perhaps seventeen hundred feet, a flock of pelicans is flying northwards. One of the attendants offered the khan a rifle, knowing his master's fondness for shooting. The khan then took a pair of glasses from the hands of the attendant who always carried them, took a look at the pelicans, and then fired. Of course, he did not touch any of them. But he was determined to show his skill; so discovering a cow, which was grazing in the bush about five furlongs off, he aimed carefully at her and fired two shots. After the second shot, the cow made off, and the khan gave us a very self-satisfied look, as much as to say the bullet could not have struck very far from the mark.

"Do you often kill anything?" we asked.

"Yes, very often."

The kings of Assyria used to have lions and human beings brought to shoot at by way of practice, but cow-shooting is a less royal quarry.

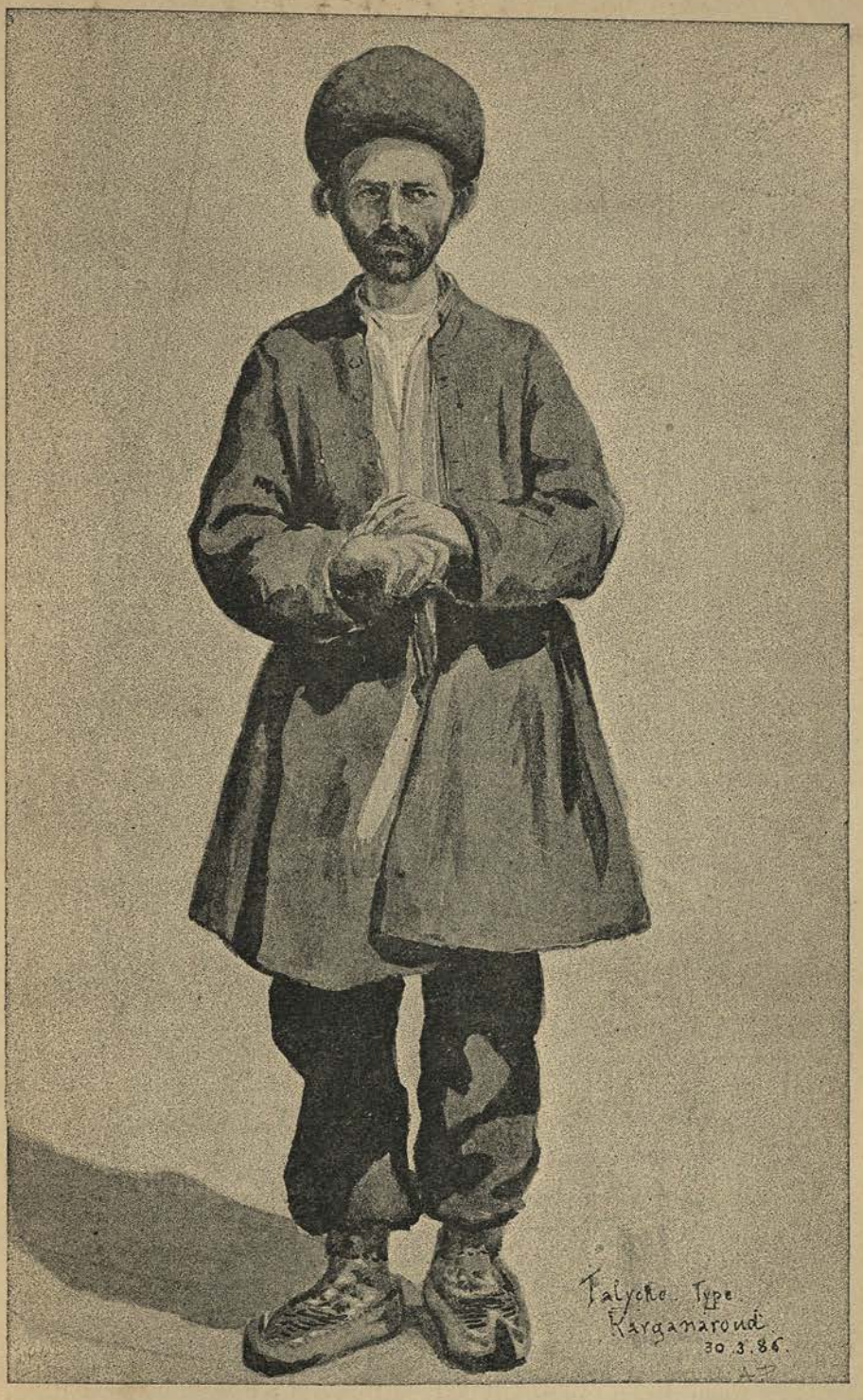
Seeing a crow on one of the roofs, the khan issues his order, and five or six vagabonds go off full tilt to drive it, by throwing stones at it, in our direction; but the crow makes off. A few wretched sparrows are still left in the mulberry trees, and the chief of the guards who takes part in the expedition shakes the trees himself; and as the sparrows fly out, the khan, who has arrived himself with a shot-gun, brings one down amid a murmur of applause from the assembled company. We pay him some fresh compliments. The khan is wreathed in smiles, and the promenade continues. We notice large rice fields, many cottages,

and an abundance of all kinds of live stock. The whole of this country is very rich. The gorge from which the river descends is well wooded, and snow is still visible in the distance.

Merchants come in with presents; and having thus paid for their patent to sell, they will be free to dispose of their merchandise to-morrow, which is market-day at the Karganrud bazaar. Serfs have come from their huts, and are drawn up in line along the road by which the lord is to pass; and with great humility, and their heads turned upon one side, they show him the object which it is their desire to present to him. One has a handsome horse-whip (gamtchi), another an elaborately embroidered carpet, a third a pair of beautifully made slippers. The serf is honoured by a look from his master, and his gift is taken over by a guard, who appears to be told off for this purpose.

It is now time for breakfast, and we return to our lodgings, where we find a well-spread table, with spoons, forks, and plates, all of English make. The dishes are very varied, as are the condiments and the dessert. We try dish after dish, not without a certain amount of satisfaction. There are pistachio-nuts, skim milk cheese, onions, pimentos, pomegranate seeds from the Mazendéran, fowls, kabab (roast mutton), ragout of mutton with sauce and dry rice, mutton broth with green peas, pheasants roasted in oil, palao with saffron, dates, raisins, pomegranates, and stewed prunes. All these dishes are served anyhow, and with no fixed order, so that the disciples of Brillet-Savarin would have a fit if they saw us eating all together the dishes which are supposed to be spoiled by mixing. We eat on unconcernedly and I must confess that, for my own part, I had a little of everything, and found it very good. Life in the open gives one an appetite, and then in travelling one soon acquires a barbarian palate.

We wash down our breakfast with some white wine of Enzeli,



A SERVANT OF THE KHAN.

which is nothing but brandy, with an addition of water. The cousin of the khan and his brother-in-law prefer the brandy because it is stronger; and before the meal is over, the former staggers to his feet and disappears, leaning for support upon two of the attendants. The host smiles with satisfaction. There is a good deal of laughing and joking at the table, and the khan, who is a very close questioner, asks us—

"What is the moon? What is the sun? What is the earth? Is there nothing in the moon? I have been told that it is inhabited by men like ourselves. What do you think? I have heard it said that, but for the sun, there would be no life upon the earth. I do not believe a word of this. One can do very well without it. I remain ten days at a time in my room without seeing it, and I am none the worse on that account. In the rainy season, the sun does not show himself during the day, nor does he at night. Is it true that the earth is heated by an internal fire?"

Then, suddenly, like a man who recurs to an idea which has already given him a good deal of thought, he said—

"Do you know how to make gold? Why should it not be made when one knows what it is composed of? Water is made without much difficulty."

At this moment, a courier is announced with letters. The khan reads them off and hands them one by one to his chief of the scribes, who receives them with the utmost respect. One of these letters puts him in a terrible rage. His face becomes convulsed, he tears up the letter and throws it to the ground, spits upon it, and uses blasphemous language; after which he drinks a glass of brandy, and, being again master of himself, continues his questions.

"Where is Bokhara? Where is Tashkend? Where is Kashgar? Are they large cities? Are they rich countries?

Do they furnish good soldiers? I am told that China is a very large country, and the most powerful empire in the world. Do the Chinese speak Turkish?"

We answer the best we can both these questions and others, which keep us at table more than two hours. Glass succeeds glass, and the bottles are soon emptied. The khan is constantly drinking to the health of one or other of us, and insists upon our drinking. This we are obliged to do, but we do not take enough to prevent our seeing how crassly ignorant he is. This man in a tunic, murdering French and trying to pass himself off for a European, reminds one of a Frank in a toga trying to stutter out Latin.

When the khan gets up, I notice beneath his tunic the plated butt of a revolver, which shows how much confidence he puts in his *entourage.*

The khan rises and retires, followed by his armed retainers. He goes off to his castle with its wooden tiles, where, we are told, he will take his customary nap.

While the master is resting, we go for a walk, accompanied by his three sons, whose acquaintance we had made in the morning. The eldest is sixteen, the second thirteen, and the youngest eleven. They are rather short, with good figures, and very agile. Their education is very simple. A mollah teaches them to read the Koran and form Arab characters, while they spend the remainder of their time roaming over their father's domain, riding, and playing with the children of their own age. The khan had refused to send his eldest son, who resembles him, it appears, in every particular, to Teheran, whither he had been summoned. We can only testify to the physical resemblance between the father and this youth, who is already treated with much consideration by his father's attendants, and takes a great interest in our weapons which he examined with the air of

a connoisseur. He is already a very good shot; and whenever the opportunity occurs, and one of his companions discovers a magpie on a tree, or a stork in a rice field, he picks up the first gun he can find and has a shot at it. After he has fired, he goes into the question of whether he has shot too low or too high, so that he will no doubt become a good marksman. It is thus that his education is being completed; and the obsequiousness of those around him, when he gives expression to an opinion, gradually accustoms him to being self-willed, and he unconsciously becomes impregnated with the idea that he is born to exercise mastery.

Passing in front of the residence of the serfs attached to the glebe, he stops and goes in by the low doorway, and one can hear the rippling laughter of women and girls. And when the young master leaves, a head crowned with dark hair and two large black eyes may be seen peering inquisitively out of the window.

The two younger sons still amuse themselves like children. With branches of willow, they cut out whistles, as French children do, wetting the bark and tapping it with a round stone till it peals off. In this way, they make *tapperiaux*, or air-guns, which they use like a syringe. They throw stones, join in a scuffle with other lads, jump about and roll on the ground, playing as becomes children of their age.

The second, a good-looking boy, who, by his resemblance to his uncle, must be like his mother, is learning to smoke with a cigarette, which he has made one of his attendants give him. Seated behind a thorn tree, he is puffing out clouds of smoke with a very grave air. The youngest boy looks at him quite enviously, and would like to imitate his example; but he cannot get any one to give him one. This little fellow is very capricious; he has fits of temper, and sometimes is very rough with the

favourites who try to caress him. He has already his favourites, being a prince into whose good graces far-seeing persons, with an eye to the future, are anxious to enter.

All the people whom we meet bow to the ground to these young princes, who do not even deign to give a nod in return. It never occurs to them to do so; they feel themselves to be of a different clay from the wretched beings who till the soil to supply them with food.

The khan possesses the soil which the serfs cultivate, and the serfs themselves, for the latter cannot leave the soil on which they are born, nor the land which surrounds it. They owe a tribute to the khan, which they never succeed in paying to the day, and their debt puts them entirely in his power. The unmarried men can take to flight, but their relatives are punished for it; the married men are kept to the soil by their families and by their feeling of resignation, while habit deprives them of all initiative, and suffering comes quite naturally to them. Any attempt at escape is severely punished; armed men watch at the cross-roads to arrest the fugitives and take them back to their master, who has them beaten, cast into prison, and fined. Having no money to pay the fine, they are condemned to forced labour, so that, after trying to improve their position, they make it worse, for they get extra labour, which they dread more than anything else.

Badly fed, weakly, having drank in at their mother's breast, so to speak, the taste for servitude, they have no courage; and, with no future or hope before them, are very lazy. They feel that they are powerless, and they are content to prolong their existence, and to die as late as possible upon the soil towards which they are bent all the day long. What is the use of their flying from this gehenna? Ten leagues away the land is an unknown one, and few people care to leave themselves in the hands of chance. They cannot muster up courage to throw off the yoke which they

find so heavy, and their purely animal feelings are satisfied as long as the yoke does not chafe their backs too much. And they only hope that they may have handsome children, who will attract the notice of the khan, and whom he will attach to his person. There is nothing better than to be the father of a pretty daughter, because she will be honoured with the favour of the master, and then married to one of his favourites, to the great advantage of all her family.

The young khans come to wish us good-bye, as they are returning to their house, together with their tutors and attendants. A man remains behind to show me the way, and I go down towards the river. Sunset is drawing near, and the croaking crows began to gather together, and the miasma of fever rises out of the rice fields. Not far from a brick kiln, with the shape of a paper bag, I remark a hovel which is inhabited, a thin column of smoke issuing from above. The walls are of crumbling mud, and over them is a roof made of branches of trees about seventeen feet high, with a few wooden tiles kept in their place by stones. Two openings have been made in the façade, which is about seventeen feet long, one for letting out the smoke, the other for the inhabitants; this second one facing south, from which direction very little rain ever comes. I stoop down and manage to enter the hut. The room is about ten feet by seven. A frayed piece of matting is laid over the earthen floor; but beyond a tray and an earthenware jar there is no furniture, not even a bed or a blanket. Close beside a fire made of straw and sticks, which fills the room with smoke, an object begins to move and then to cry. This turns out to be a little girl, five or six years old, half naked and very dirty. The mother comes in, all in rags, still young, with handsome black eyes, which are full of sadness. She carries on her back her youngest born, a girl two years of age, shaking all over with milk fever. She clings closely to her mother's neck, as

if to a forlorn hope. She lets her head droop on her mother's shoulder, and does not even open her eyes. She is as thin as a skeleton, with delicate features, and looks at death's door.

The mother says, "The child has been ill for three months, and we have given up all hope of curing her."

"Do you do anything for her?"

"When the sun is shining, I take her out to get her warm. Can you suggest a remedy?"

A SERF'S WIFE.

"She ought to be well clad. She has only a linen chemise on."

"I have nothing else to clothe her with. I fold her in my arms."

"What! have you not been able to obtain a bit of blanket for her?"

"We have no money. Who is going to give us anything? Fire is of no avail against the fever chill. Good gentleman, give us some remedy."

The husband comes back from the rice field, with his spade over his shoulder, his naked legs crusted with mud. He is tall, sunburnt, lean, and deeply pitted with the small-pox. He confirms what his wife has said; and she, too, has a good deal of fever about her, while he suffers from rheumatics. I make him a present, and tell him to come in the morning for some medicine. He thanks me with a low bow and enters into his den. The woman stands staring open-mouthed at us, looking the very picture of misery, The crows have ceased cawing, and night is falling fast.

Amman has got unused to all this misery since he has been in contact with the Russians. He confides his impressions to me, and, pointing to some cows, observes—

"They are better off than these people; they go and feed where they please. When grass fails in one place, they go to another. These people cannot. Truly, it is better to be stock than men in this country."

He grumbles at the khan, but in Russian, of course. "In his country, no one dares to be rich. He lays hands upon everything. This is why he never lies down to rest in peace. He will have the same end as his father."

It appears that in the family of the khan most of the members die a violent death; and he was near being murdered when a lad. Amman tells the story as follows:—

"His father was a very proud and ruthless man, hard to every one, with no regard for those about him, and sticking at nothing to gratify his whims. Upon the other side of the mountain, not far from Ardebil, live the Chaksevem Tartars. The khan of this tribe gave a grand festival on the circumcision of his eldest son, and invited his neighbour at Karganrud. The rejoicings lasted several days. The invited guest offended his host by his haughty demeanour. He maltreated his servants; and, when the worse for drink, made fun of one of his neighbours at table.

"He then started off without even condescending to address the customary expression of thanks to his host. While passing through the Chaksevem territory, he behaved as if he was in a conquered country. Those whom he had insulted are of Turkish race, very courageous, and ready to wipe out an offence in blood. Hospitality being the most sacred of all duties, they swallowed the insult and contained their anger as long as the khan's guest was on their soil. But they at once met and resolved to exact a terrible revenge for the uncalled-for insult. They kept their intention secret until the time came for 'tasting blood.' The opportunity soon came. For a whole night fifty men, mounted upon excellent horses, rode onward; and during the day they concealed themselves in a wood near Karganrud. At a time when men are usually in their first sleep, and least likely to awake, they surrounded the dwelling of the khan, slew his servitors, and, having surprised him in bed, hacked him to pieces. In their fury, they determined to annihilate his race; and they searched everywhere for his two sons, whom they failed to find, as well as his wife, who was away from home. A female servant had carried off the two boys under cover of the darkness, and had taken refuge in the house of a serf, hiding them in a large chest.

"The widow of the khan had her two children fetched, and went with them to Teheran, where they were brought up with other young nobles. Some time after, these young men entered into possession of their domain.

"The present khan, now that he is master, continues the traditions of his ancestors. He is despotic, proud, and vindictive; and he is full of suspicion, for he has never forgotten the murder of his father. He surrounds himself with ruffians of every nationality, whom he retains in his service; and he has thus a small force of determined men upon whom he can count for any enterprise, there being scarcely a crime which they have not committed.

"The shah insists upon being master in his kingdom, and he is resolved to crush the least symptoms of independence among the khans who inhabit distant provinces. So when he returned from his last journey to Europe, and was beset at Reshd by petitioners from the Talich, beseeching for justice, he was very incensed. His first impulse was to give orders to have the khan got rid of. But the latter is said to have gained the ear of the

THE KHAN AND HIS SUITE.

prime minister, by means of liberal presents, and the shah deferred his revenge."

This was the story which, as Amman told us, was generally believed in the country; and he added that he should not be sorry when we were out of it.

After hearing this story, we laid down to sleep in the beds which were similar to those which are to be found all through

Asia, simply because there are none more primitive. They do not differ in the slightest degree from the pallets of the Roman and of the Greek world. A rectangle upon four feet is consolidated by ropes, which form a net, and a by no means springy mattress, but one very much ventilated, upon which you spread your blankets. If my memory does not deceive me, Homer's heroes slept upon beds made out of the skins of oxen, which were not so hard to the back.

Upon our waking, we were told that the khan was going to pay us a visit. It had been arranged the day before that he should be photographed, as well as the castle he was building; and he arrived wearing the full uniform of an Austrian general, minus the epaulettes.

He had put on the kula, or Persian head-dress. He had a dark blue tunic, light blue trousers, a sword, and the so-called Neapolitan shoes, which, I believe, are made at Marseilles.

We follow the khan, who comes to a halt in front of his palace, where we photograph him in all his splendour. After that, we are shown over the building, which has nothing remarkable about it except its thick walls, numerous rooms, its baths, and an immense reception room, from which the Caspian may be seen across the shrubberies and rice fields. The khan seems to be particularly proud of a white stone encrusted in the bricks at the level of the first story, in the corner of the wall. He pointed it out to us, and was anxious to know whether it would come out in the photograph. When he answered in the affirmative, his face beamed with smiles; and we wondered whether he had had all these bricks put up so as to set this stone in them, as one orders a ring so as to set off a fine diamond.

Upon our return to breakfast, the khan begins to talk to us about music, and points to a man squatting near the door. Upon a sign, this man enters the room and kneels down by the fireplace

at the corner where the brush and the wood basket are kept in European houses. He is an artist of some mark, nevertheless; and this way of receiving him shows that our host has not the same consideration for tenors which they enjoy in France and England.

A tray is cleared of its nuts and almonds, and is handed to the singer, who is very tall and thin, with a very modest demeanour.

THE KHAN'S MINSTREL.

This would surprise any one who had never been in the East, for, it may be asked, "what is the use of this tray?" As a matter of fact it is indispensable, for it will serve both as a piano and as a screen to conceal the contortions of his mouth, as well as a sort of speaking trumpet.

Thereupon, the singer begins to beat the tray with his fingers, keeping it poised upon the palm of his hand, resting it on the

thumb when he is using his fingers. He raises and lowers the tray, balances himself on his haunches, and finally pours from the throat formidable, piercing notes, which are quite dangerous for delicate ears. The khan asks us what we think of him, and we reply that he has a superb voice. He then asks us if it is the custom to sing very loud in France; and when we say "Yes," the khan urges the artist to raise his voice, which he does with a vengeance.

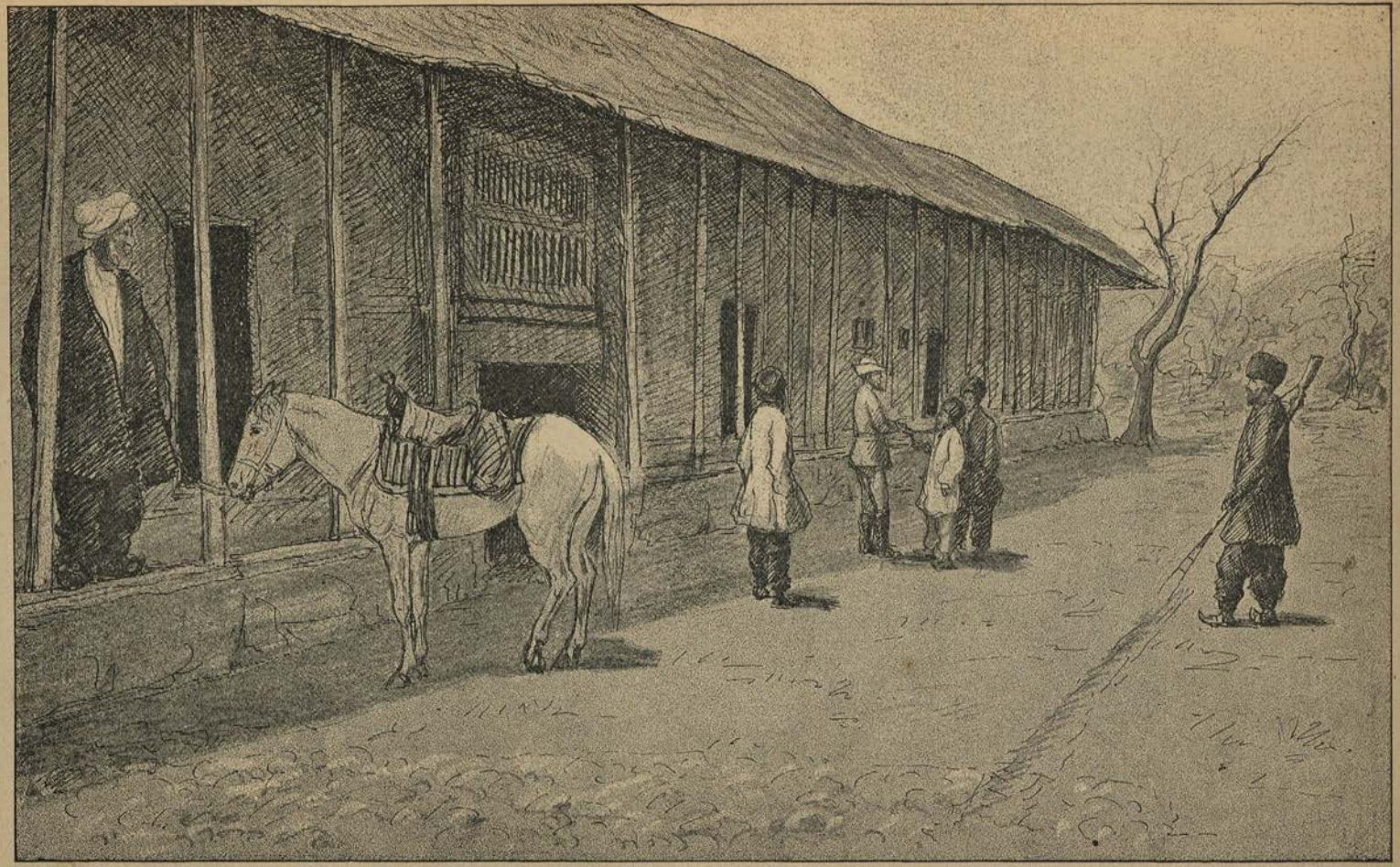
"Can they get as high as that in France?" the khan asks us.

We express our doubts, and our compliments produce the expected effect; for during the whole time of the meal the poor wretch wriggles about with his tray, and when he does not sing as his master likes, the latter speaks very sharply to him, and even calls him "dog," ordering him to change his tune and sing over and over again. He rolls them out as from a musical box. Then the khan forgets all about him, just as one might forget to stop an engine, and the singing goes on for two mortal hours. The tenor does not dare to stop, despite the sweat which is trickling down his forehead, despite the hoarseness of his voice, due to the complete drying up of the vocal cords. At last the khan makes a sign for the concert to cease, and the poor famished minstrel withdraws with many profound reverences.

I doubt whether any one of my friends has been "executed" as carefully, even by pianists.

One of us happens to take out a leather tobacco-pouch, made to imitate crocodile skin, and this leads to a scientific and naturalist discussion between the khan, his brother-in-law, and his first cousin, who is not yet thoroughly drunk.

One of them asserts that he has seen the animal in the sea, the other has seen him in a river. They enumerate the most peculiar animals they have seen or heard of, and come to the conclusion that it must be the hippopotamus or the seal.



A CONSULTATION.

Amman, who acts as interpreter, insinuates that this leather must belong to the same country as the khan's negro. The discussion having been closed, we rise from the table, and the khan settles into a seat in front of our lodging, and the scribes take their places on a carpet in front of him, while he transacts some current business.

Amman, who is anxious for information, returns to the charge; and we draw for him the shape of a crocodile, which he defines as "a large lizard, with big teeth, living in rivers in the land of the negro."

We ask him what is the use of this negro, and he tells us that it is considered the right thing for a great man to have one to amuse him. He gets cuffed and kicked, and has to make grimaces which afford his master much amusement. But our host does not appreciate jokes, so the black man is of no importance in his eyes. He might have become a favourite, but as it is he only affords sport to the servants, who make a butt of him. His face does not denote much intelligence.

According to Amman, these black men are caught like birds in a snare. Once they are caught, they give up to despair, wish to die, and refuse food. As they are known to be gluttonous, they are offered jam as a temptation, and it is one which they can rarely resist. After this they are given the same food as their companions. Some of them fetch a very high price.

While the khan is signing papers, he is also listening to complaints, dealing out justice in the open air, like St. Louis under his oak. Several persons throw themselves at his feet to thank him, and kiss his knees. He does not like this exuberant politeness, and his guards seize hold of them and eject them brutally among the crowd of inquisitive spectators. But the business is soon transacted, the crowd disperses, and the khan returns home, preceded and followed by his men-at-arms.

It is our turn to be beset by such persons of every kind. The rumour has got abroad that one of us possesses the art of healing and of administering drugs; and this rumour refers to Capus, who has some notions of medicine. He has quite a crowd at his door. Cases of rickets are not rare; there are frequent traces of syphilis, while the number of victims to fever are innumerable, so that our medicine-chest would soon be exhausted. We only administer medicine, therefore, to those who are absolutely in want of it. We must confess that the success of the European doctor is not due to the high idea which the natives have of a wise man of the West. If he "took" so well from the first, it was because he

OUR ATTENDANT, AMMAN.

did not sell his remedies. Thus the regular doctor of the khan, who resides close to us, is, we are told, very vexed to find himself so neglected, and he has a smile of contempt for the credulous people who allow themselves to be imposed upon by charlatans who happen to be passing that way.

Capus would not be sorry to be rid of these very troublesome customers, and he advises them to consult his neighbour. But no one listens to his advice; and when we repeat it, one of them says—

"What is the use of our going to the khan's doctor? We are poor, and he sells everything at an exorbitant price; his drugs rarely effect a cure. It is no use asking for his aid, if you do not bring the money with you; he will not even trouble himself to give you advice. He allows the poor to die off like flies; he is only a doctor for those who can pay."

The doctor might perhaps allege as an excuse that the gratitude which would be due to him, in default of a fee, is even a scarcer commodity at Kargamrud than in Paris. A St. Vincent de Paul is an exception in all countries. We all like to be repaid for the trouble we take on behalf of others.

BY THE WATER'S EDGE AT NIGHT.

CHAPTER III.

FROM RESHD TO TEHERAN.

The wine—No bread—The reason why—Nearing the Guilek country—Reshd—A governor taking his departure—Prefectoral movement in Persia—The departure of the great lady—Refuge—Merovingian period—No more rain and no more forest—Central Asia begins—The plain of Iran.

April 21.

THE khan has procured us some saddle and pack horses to reach Enzeli; and he has kept us two days with him. We are not sorry to continue our journey; we have had enough of his excessive politeness, and it may be presumed that he is not sorry to see us start.

We are in his way, as our presence imposes a certain restraint upon him. In spite of the offer which he makes for us to prolong our visit, we say good-bye to the khan on the 1st of April, and start for Chifa-Rud.

The route is a pleasant one in the sunshine, following the course of the river as far as the Caspian, sometimes in the pebbly

bed of the stream and sometimes climbing up to the banks. Then we thread our way through woods, with the sun's rays filtering athwart the foliage and falling in a golden shower as through the stained glass of some cathedral window. We notice, as we ride along, some very fine bushes of box-wood.

At the village of Karganrud, we alter our course and bend southwards, towards Alalan, the mud and sand alternating. There is still a good deal of forest; and at a long distance from any dwelling places, the gleditschias, bristling with prickles, are trimmed like the poplars on a French roadside. As they grow, the branches are cut off for firewood, and the trunks stand short and stunted, twisted by the high winds from the sea. We meet a Talichi carrying something under his arm like an umbrella, which proves to be merely a wooden ploughshare. Amid the prickly bushes we can see a number of reed huts, and they remind one of the villages of the African bushmen. These hovels are inhabited by woodmen employed in the forest, who manufacture charcoal and various wooden utensils. We catch a sight of some of them who have been attracted by the barking of their dogs. They are very dark-complexioned, and with their hatchets in their hands and their legs enveloped in animals' skins to protect them from the thorns, they look like savages.

Alalan is a village of very little importance, with a bazaar, where we make a vain effort to get some wine. No one will sell us any; and though one of the khan's men tells us that they all drink it in secret, they declare that they have not got any.

"Why," we ask, "do they deny having any?"

"Because they are ashamed to let a stranger see that they are bad Mussulmans, and also because you are accompanied by the khan's men, being afraid that we should tell our master of it, and that he would force them to supply him when necessary."

"You mean that he would not pay for what he took?"

The horseman answered with a smile.

Upon leaving Alalan, after a brief halt on the sea-shore, the khan's men retrace their steps, only one remaining with us as a guide.

We are still in the forest at nightfall; and though it is pitch-dark, there is no rain, and the ride is a charming one.

When darkness sets in, the only sounds audible are the constant roar of the sea, the hoofs of the horses, the sound of the whip upon their quarters, and the cry of the men to attention. The path is narrow, and it is necessary to be very careful not to get the boughs of the trees flying back in one's face.

The leader gives a word of warning, and this is passed all along the line. It is the same when crossing a ferry; the words "right" and "left" being called out, as the occasion may require.

But the beasts of prey are not long in issuing from the retreats in which they have slept away the day, like the malefactors of a large city, and the forest soon becomes animated. They prowl about in quest of something to devour, and the jackals cry, inviting one another to a feast, while the birds of prey utter their lugubrious notes, some as if calling piteously for help, others as if issuing a sharp word of command.

There is a whole world of animated life, struggling, shrieking, and pinched by hunger—a true type of the beings that nature, who puts them upon the stage, has divided into strong and weak. And suddenly, like the Greek chorus of ancient tragedy, the toads and frogs in the marshes begin to croak, reminding one of the chatter of listless and indifferent crowds. One would almost fancy that there must be relays of these frogs to keep up the chatter.

For the last few minutes we have been wading in the mud, and can feel the damp and fever coming up. The horses begin

to slip about, and before us extends a vast sheet of dark water, with not a star reflected in it.

"Chifa-Rud," observes the guide.

"Upon the other side?"

"Ha! ha!"

Thereupon he hails the people on the other side, as one of them is wanted to point out the ferry. The sky is clouded over, and the night inky black. After several calls, a voice answers, "Who goes there?"

"The guests of the khan."

"Welcome to you."

And we hear the sound of a body plunging into the water, then the peculiar chafing sound of a horsemen moving through the water, and finally one cannot make out the motion of the legs, so that the water is evidently deep. At last the ferryman arrives.

"Salamaleïkon!"

"Valeïkomassalam!"

And we follow the phantom who shows us the way without saying a word. He spoke just now, so he cannot be a shadow, and we are not crossing the Styx.

We make the other side without mishap, and then cross the fields, feeling our way as best we can, so as to avoid the prickly hedges. We hear the barking of dogs; a gate is opened, and some one comes towards us with an immense lantern, covered with squares of paper, and bids us get off our horses.

By the light of this gigantic lantern, which has very little candle inside, like the large bodies which contain very petty souls, we settle ourselves down for the night. The room offered us is not very large; a carpet from Meshed, or elsewhere, is spread upon the floor, the door closes fairly well, and there is no fear of catching cold. We get off our muddy boots, and drink some

excellent milk while listening to the first raindrops of the storm, with the satisfaction of people who are under cover.

We swallow a few bits of roast salmon and some cold rice, with a cup of excellent tea on the top of them. They are very comfortable, these primitive houses built of mud, covered with thatch, and having a wooden gallery running all round the inner courtyard. We have scarcely made these reflections, when Pepin jumps up and points with his finger to a black spot on the wall—two black spots—several black spots. He puts his finger close to one, and the spot moves. Why, it is an insect—a bug, hundreds of bugs, which are devouring us with their eyes from the wall and the ceiling, preparatory to devouring us in another way.

Pepin does not like the bugs; the bugs do not like Capus; and for my own part I am not very fond of them. Capus remains in the room, and the two others spread their blankets out on the balcony, covering themselves over with an oil-cloth, and lying down at a safe distance from the enemy. The upshot is that I sleep comfortably, despite the rain which is splashing at my feet; while Pepin, lying close beside me, is tormented the whole night by these wretched bugs, which have followed him, but leave me in peace. It is odd how, in this world, misfortune pursues certain people, while it spares others for no better reason than these bugs could have given.

Upon awaking we find that Chifa-Rud is upon the sea-shore, forming a very pretty landscape with the wooded mountains capped with snow. We take some photographs, to the great delight of the inhabitants, who are much amused at the box resting on three legs, and the artists hiding their heads under a piece of black cloth. They call for their neighbours to come and look, laughing and staring after the manner of people who don't understand what is going on.

At Chifa-Rud, the Talichi, which is a peculiar Turkish

dialect, is still spoken ; but Guilek is also spoken by some of the people. The population is a mixed one ; and side by side with the tall and elegant figure of the Talichi may be seen the heavier and bigger-boned type of the better-fed Guilek. The soil is fertile and well cultivated, and there are abundant rivers ; but the use of bread is unknown. When we ask for some to eat with the excellent salmon-peel, of which we never seem to get tired, they bring us a sort of rice-cake baked the day before.

STARTING FROM CHIFA-RUD.

"Why do you not eat bread ?"

"We prefer rice."

"Why ?"

"Because we should want four times as much bread as rice to 'fill our stomachs ;' because we have good land for growing rice, plenty of water and inundations, which are not favourable for wheat. Moreover, the streams and the sea supply us with an abundance of fish, and we can insure a good supply of food with very little trouble."

"Don't you enjoy eating bread occasionally ?"

"No, we don't care for it. Another reason why we prefer rice is that it takes such a time to make bread. First of all the land must be sown, then there is the harvest, the threshing of the wheat, the kneading of the flour, and the baking; whereas rice, once it has been gathered, has only to be decorticated, and cooked in the pan, with water or fat, with or without saffron. It is eaten hot, and the rest is allowed to cool and is eaten hard the next day. If it is grilled before the fire in lumps, it forms a nice golden crust. You see that it is better to eat rice."

"Yes, indeed."

It would, I think, be difficult to make these people see that they are mistaken in doing without bread.

Passing through clumps of wild pomegranate trees and rice fields, we arrive at Tcharpatchal, a large village in the midst of marshes, not far from the *murdab* (stagnant water).

It might be taken for an African village, with its dazzling sunshine, its huts and summer-houses built on pillars, its threshing-floors and barns, to which access is gained by trunks of trees with steps hewn in them. There is an exuberance of life and light about the place.

We make a brief halt here, and it is the last place where Talichi is spoken. Henceforth, we hear only Guilek, though many of the people understand Persian.

From Tcharpatchal we proceed to Enzeli, a town of little interest, and with a port of no importance, situated upon the road to Reshd and Kazvin.

The influence of the Russian agent appeared to be very great; and he was at once obeyed by the servitors of the governor, who was absent. Yet this agent was a Persian, though, as he kept repeating at every opportunity, "a Russian subject, monsieur." This is a title much sought after here, just as that of ally was in the days when Rome was constantly pushing further back the

limits of her frontier, extending her protection to the peoples, and making their kings obey her.

The next day (April 4th), in pouring rain, a covered bark conveyed us in a very short time to Peri-Bazar. From there to Reshd the road is, it appears, a very good one in fair weather; but when we travelled over it, our horses were up to their chests in water and could hardly extricate their feet from the mud.

We pay a visit to the governor, who is busy signing a quantity

FROM PERI-BAZAR TO RESHD BY A FLOODED ROAD.

of papers. He is very affable, and offers us a lodging in his house, in some buildings at the further end of his residence. He is just about to leave, for he tells us that he is at variance with the court, and prefers abandoning his post to submitting to the exactions of the minister of finance. He was very kind to us.

His palace, forming one side of a square, is a pile of buildings with galleries running round several rectangular courtyards. Standing a little way off the façade, the tumbledown condition of the buildings is very apparent. We are shown to a room looking

on to a garden planted with willows, with a fountain of dirty water, from which the host of servants came to fetch water for the kitchen, and perform their ablutions, much to the disgust of our body-servant, who calls them ——

The rooms next to ours have floors upon which one dare not venture unless one is good acrobat. The beams in many places have no boards over them, and one can see the heads of the people on the floor below. There is no end to the number of holes, and they serve for very various purposes.

A venerable Persian, with a beard as black as jet—thanks to the liberal use of dye—is told off to look after us, and we confide to him our astonishment at seeing the house in such a deplorable state.

He tells us that the shah allows a certain sum each year for keeping the palace of the governor in repair; but governors are constantly changing. They look upon the palace as an hotel in which they will spend a short time, and do not care to see after its being repaired. The credit is spent in other ways.

This worthy old gentleman, who carefully conceals his age, drinks, in the space of about two hours, twenty glasses of native brandy, and smokes about thirty cigarettes. He is accompanied by a young officer, and by two boys of from twelve to thirteen, who imitate him to the best of their ability, and are soon quite tipsy. There can be no doubt about it, drunkenness is one of the curses of the country.

The young officer tells us that he has studied, and the way in which he handles one of our maps, representing the west coast of the Caspian Sea, shows that this is the case. He takes his bearings carefully, and explains to the old man, who listens to him while smoking placidly, where Khorassan, Bagdad, India, Teheran, France, and Constantinople are. He thought that he had got hold of a map of the world, which he rearranged in the coolest

fashion. Constantinople was on the top of a mountain, Teheran became a seaport, and the Khorassan took the place of Batum. The young officer was a major, and his listener was, or had been, a general.

The major had studied our language, and could speak it a

A PERSIAN GENERAL.

little. Perhaps the four melancholy lines which follow, and which I read on the wall of the room, were his—

"Moi, pouvre Abdullah kan que je suis,
Tombé ici malouréjement,
Suis élève du governement.
Sortons de cette pays."

At Reshd, we had to hire horses to pursue our journey; for the post had run short of them, and we had baggage which could only be carried slowly. By the intermediary of the Russian agent, the consul being absent with all his family, we got into negotia-

tions with a muleteer. Bargains are not concluded rapidly in this country, and the vali had started before we were ready. It was advisable to let him get on some way in advance, for he had such a numerous suite that the road was very crowded, and we should have had much difficulty in finding room at the posting-stations, or getting a horse in case of accident.

This delay gave us the opportunity of witnessing some curious scenes very typical of the country.

The vali started on the 5th of April. He had been very popular in the country, and there was an immense crowd in front of the palace, thousands of horsemen having assembled to escort him. The piteous wails of the common people were to be heard in all directions, for the vali had never refused alms to a poor man. The lamentations were general.

The master having departed, the scene suddenly changed. The women who had remained behind, and were only to start on the following day, could scarcely get served. All was disorder in the palace, for the attendants, who do not follow the fortunes of the vali, are quite indifferent as to what happens, and the confusion is indescribable.

The following morning, the outside of the palace resounds with cries of a different kind from those of the previous day. There are no longer any sentinels, or men armed with long staves, who keep any one from coming near. The tradesmen have all flocked into the square, and are confiding their troubles to one another. "That so and so owed him so much." "So he does me." "Do you think he'll pay?" "I am afraid that we shan't get a sixpence." "I intend to go and ask for what he owes me." And so, mustering courage, they make their way into the first courtyard, where the discussion begins again, and we can hear shouting and strong language. But, to judge by what we can see for ourselves, no one can be got to pay anything.

The garden upon which our room overlooks is invaded by a crowd of people in a great state of mind. Groups are formed, and we can see people whispering to one another very mysteriously, while others are gesticulating. Some of the invaders are left by themselves and keep apart, while others, who are known to be influential, and to have friends at court, have quite a crowd around them.

Two or three more particularly, who have just arrived from Teheran, and who are easy of recognition, with their frock coats of a European cut and their patent leather shoes, are greeted very respectfully. They look very dignified and consequential. Every one is anxious to have the honour of offering them a cigarette and a glass of tea. A few merchants have elbowed their way so far, the commoner people remaining outside. They are treated with much consideration, and they carry a writing-book at their belt, from which they take out small bits of paper, which they present more or less respectfully, according to the opinion which they have of their debtor. One of these merchants accosts an important personage, and humbly presents him with the bill which he has been hiding in his sleeve. The latter does not discuss the details of the bill, but makes all sorts of promises to his creditor, who crosses his hands over his stomach with a profound obeisance and lowers his head in confusion, when the important official lays his hand in a friendly fashion upon his shoulder, before dismissing him. Mollahs, in white turbans, are sitting down, listlessly regarding all these petty discussions. They do not miss a single glass of tea or cigarette, which are handed round, not by a handsome boy, but by some dirty youth, with one foot bare and the other thrust into a worn-out shoe, which lets in the daylight at several places.

A great quantity of tea is consumed, and cigarettes are smoked by the hundred, while men are coming to the fountain to fetch

water for their coffee-pots, or to clean the mouthpieces of their pipes. Others come to wash their hands or their feet, and Amman may well be furious and compare them to the most unclean of animals.

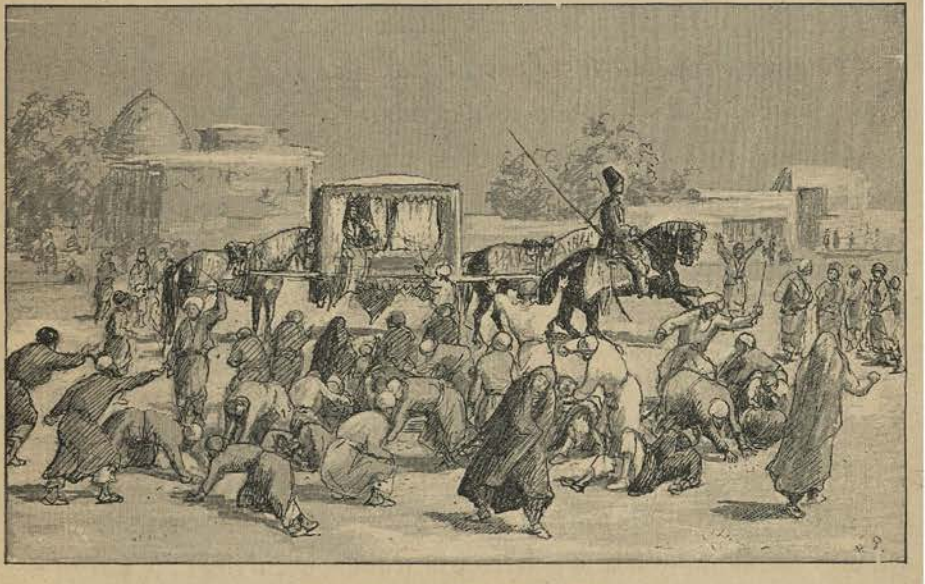
All of a sudden, the crowd clears out of the garden and makes for a square adjoining the harem. There is a chorus of cries and groans, and we imagine that some great public misfortune must have occurred. We ask what it is, and are told that it is the vali's wife, who is leaving and saying good-bye to the population. Upon the square there is a crowd of poor people in rags, women and children predominating, who stoop down, pick themselves up again, and rush towards a travelling chaise drawn by two splendid horses, which men with long staves have great difficulty in protecting from the wave of the populace. Armed horsemen endeavour to make some impression upon the mass, and to clear the way for the palanquins placed upon the backs of gigantic mules. These palanquins are filled with the female followers of the great lady, who thrusts her hands through the curtains of the carriage to distribute small coin to the people.

This furnishes us with the explanation of the din, which dies away for a moment, only to break out again with renewed force when a fresh shower of coins comes from the carriage. There is a desperate struggle for the money, and all decorum is forgotten. The women unveil and tear each other's clothes; grown-up men struggle with mere children, and even the greybeards join in the fray. A thousand throats give hoarse utterance to their gratitude.

But as there is a limit to the greatest generosity, and as the rain begins to fall, the convoy moves on and threads its way through the tortuous streets. The palanquins swing to and fro, and have great difficulty in forcing their way through the crowd, as the noble lady starts on her journey, with her armed escort. The din and the cries of discontent begin again, the common

people soon forgetting her largesses. The touching wails of those who wished her good-bye are succeeded by the shrieks and disputes of those who are struggling for the coins which have not been picked up, reminding one of how gulls fight for the morsels of food thrown out in the track of a vessel.

Although we are in a great hurry to reach Teheran, I cannot leave Reshd without saying a word about its "best," which is close beside the vali's palace, like a remedy close beside a disease.



DEPARTURE OF THE VALI'S WIFE.

The name of "best" is given to a place of refuge where a man is sacred from the pursuit of a powerful enemy, just as many places in Western Europe were during the Middle Ages. The "best" at Reshd is a mosque of very little outward show, with a balcony overlooking a terrace. No one has the right to drag from it any man who has taken refuge there, and this custom, which we regard as outlandish, now that we have just laws, is of great benefit in a country where justice is very loosely administered, and where punishments are often very unfairly inflicted.

We then start for Kudum, the next station, in the driving rain and mud. But for the ruts, we should never get there, the mud in them being liquid, and so enabling our horses to lift their feet out of it. All the way we see rice fields, poplar-trees, with, here and there, an elm-tree, the branches of which are very few, as they are lopped every year. The tops of these trees are very disorderly, but they are like the heads of those who do not like to appear bald and conceal their denuded pates by a careful arrangement of their few remaining locks. Then we get into the wood, and it is night-time when we reach the station, which is a miserable place, and overrun by a host of travellers of every description. With scarcely enough fire to dry our clothes, a concert of frogs to send us to sleep, and with the wind howling through the ill-closed doors and windows, and whistling round our heads, we are not likely to forget Kudum.

Upon the 7th of April we start, with the sun shining, for Rustemabad, slowly climbing through the forest of beeches, willows, box-trees, and maples, till we see the Kizil-Uzen, very broad and swift, flowing below. We are unmistakably on the mountain, for the road comes to an end, and there is nothing but a steep, stony path, along which our sorry steeds trace their steps with wonderful care. My horse, however, indulges in a fall upon the edge of the river, which is flowing three hundred feet beneath. He falls upon me, but, as he has a horror of the void and is careful not to budge, we escape without any accident. The path winds, following the course of the river; but, to my great surprise, I come upon a squad of fifty workmen making a road. There are about sixty yards done, and, to judge by the rate at which they are progressing, it will take several centuries to complete it as far as Reshd.

Rustemabad is a picturesque station, with the forest in the distance, the country well cultivated, and plenty of rice-fields,

while to the south begins the land of desolation. Here the Caucasus forests end, and at the same time we get quit of the rain. We leave our muleteer's horses, which are pretty well done up, and we engage others at the posting-house.

In the morning of the 8th of April we reach Rudbar, in the centre of an olive grove; the mountains are very bare and remind

A FALL UPON THE EDGE OF KIZIL-UZEN.

me of Andalusia. We still follow the course of the Kizil-Uzen, which takes the Persian name of Safid-Rud at Rustemabad, where the Turkish domain ends. We cross the picturesque bridge of Mendjil, where we see a goatherd driving his goats across large fragments of rock, and we feel with a vengeance the well-known Mendjil wind, which twists about the few trees in this region, which has all the appearance of Central Asia. We are

not surprised, therefore, to see near Mendjil a winter encampment of men of Turkish race—the Kurds—who have erected some reed huts in the midst of a plain, where their half-starved flocks find but a meagre pittance. The scenery is wild and grand, the setting sun lights up the clouds, and the barren slopes assume the brightest of tints. In the midst of the darkness we cross the bridge over the Safid-Rud, and we pass the night in the miserable hovel which does duty for a station. It is far from clean, and is kept by two Kurds who are brothers.

Upon the 9th of April we start, with the sun shining brightly. The Safid-Rud has to be waded across, and the river is broad, with a very strong current. A horde of half-starved wretches rush to our horses' heads, under the pretence of lending us their aid. We do not in the least want them, but this gives them the opportunity of asking us for alms with the pertinacity of crows or jackdaws. Begging is a national concern. We then begin to climb the mountain again, and the ascent is easy and the scenery charming. From the summit of the pass of Karzan the view is superb, in the distance being seen the snowy peaks, the bare mountains with their variety of tints, and the sea with its white-crested breakers.

We descend towards Mazraa, and as the deep snow is melting our progress is much impeded. The mountains from which we are emerging have all the geological aspect of the chains of Central Asia, and they precede the steppe and the plain which extends as far as Kamtchatka.

If you happen to visit Mazraa, where Persian is spoken, ascend the hill at the foot of which the road passes, climb as high as you can get, and cast a farewell look northward to the white mountains where you have passed so many toilsome hours, supposing that you have come through them, as we did, in the midst of a thaw, and then turning your back upon them contemptuously, as upon

the past, wrap yourself in contemplation and look to the future. It will be the hour when the sun is setting, and if you have taken the precaution of bringing a cloak to wrap round you, you need be in no hurry to come down. You will have a grand piece of scenery before you. At your feet the plain is enclosed between two moles, as if it were the sea, receding towards the east, where it forms the sky-line. To your left there is a lofty chain of mountains covered with snow, with summits which stand out like

MAZRAA.

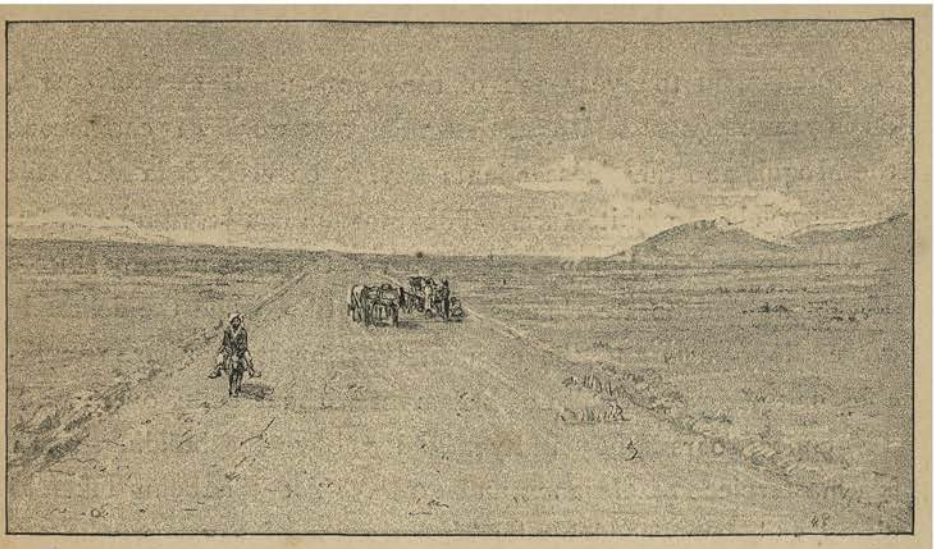
watchmen over the gates of a universe. One of them is visible and seems very lofty, despite the perspective, being not impossibly the Demawend. To the right, the chain is lower and seems to get smaller in the distance, gradually diminishing in hills which allow of a road running through them towards the desert of Iran. These two chains form part of the Karzan mountains, like two wings of an army following in their rear.

You see no trees anywhere. In the steppe there is nothing but occasional columns of smoke to indicate the abode of man, or

of villages huddled together in the valleys, like specks of grey upon a greenish ground. But the distant tents are of every variety of hue, so much so that you cannot take your eyes off them, and everything which you cannot make out distinctly is charming, and has all the attraction of the unknown, tempting the traveller on and on.

When daylight fades, the distance is enveloped in mist, fades away, and you alight from your horse. You then remark that there is a stir of men in the square-built village, constructed in imitation of a fortress. You hear the cries of children, the chatter of women with pitchers on their heads, going to or coming from the brink of some limpid stream, in the bed of which carrion maybe is rotting, and you hear the bells of the caravan tinkling merrily as it comes in. You see some beautiful flowers growing out of perhaps a bit of horse dung, which has dropped on the road and has had some water fall upon it; while the lark sings blithely, as light-hearted Frenchmen will do amid all their trouble and distress. And you lie down to rest, resolved to get up early, mount your horse, and see for yourself what are these specks dotted over the steppe; the molehills of men, towns no doubt.

PERSIAN WOMAN.



THE ROYAL HIGHWAY FROM KAZVIN TO TEHERAN.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM TEHERAN TO BOSTAN.

The start from Teheran—The great historical road—In the company of pilgrims—Desolation of the salt desert—The Caspian Pylæ—Our chance companions: Hadji Baba the philosopher—A village in a small oasis: the sort of life led there—Manufactory of saltpetre at Aouvan—Piety of Sadik the van-driver—Peace and ventilation—Life underground—The karys—The Turkomans close at hand—A night in a caravansary.

FROM Kazvin there is a post road to Teheran, the journey being performed in carriages of Russian build, with the douga, and drawn by three horses. By feeing the driver well, one can get along at a good pace, the road running straight across the steppe. We remained only long enough at Teheran to make our preparations, but we paid a visit to Rages and Veramine, about the interesting ruins of which I shall have something to say later on.

In the meanwhile I must not forget to mention one marvellous sight at Veramine, and that is the Djuma Mosque, built by Abu-

Saïd Khan, in the year 722 of the Hegira. It was, of course, during the reign of a Mogul that this great work was carried out, the Moguls and their descendants having covered Asia and India with marvels of architecture. This mosque is a beautiful one, but it will soon have disappeared. There still remain many stuccos of the most elaborate richness of decoration, while the delicately carved door-posts and the exquisitely wrought doors are remarkable for their great wealth of ornament without being overloaded. The cupola soars lightly and yet boldly above the building, which is a masterpiece of elegance and grace. Yet it is being taken to pieces and demolished bit by bit by a lot of savages, who are inundating it in order to shake its foundations and bring it to the ground. And all this to get its bricks for building a wall for some garden or stable.

At Teheran, we are the guests of our minister, M. de Balloy, and his charming wife, whose kindness and hospitality we shall never forget. We start for Meshed in a van with our luggage, taking with us letters of recommendation for the English and the Russian agents. We have resolved to try and make our way into Afghanistan.

The van has been hired from two Tartar Russians, who undertake to convey us in twenty-eight days to the holy city of the Shiites, of which the tomb of the Imam Riza is the principal attraction.

We are to meet them beyond the station of Kabut-Gumbaz, where we are to go with our post-horses, while they go by way of the shrine of Shah-Abdul-Azim, which we have already visited, and from which they are to start with a second van loaded with merchandise and pilgrims.

The road which we are about to follow is the great highway of armies and conquerors. Alexander went this road in the past —how many have trodden his footsteps—and it was at Rages

A JEWESS OF TEHERAN.

that he halted, when, having resolved to strike a final blow at Darius, who was flying before him, he made his preparations to attack him. At each step, we encounter cities which are mentioned in history and aggrandized by the perspective of centuries. The opinion which one has formed of them undergoes a great change when once they are seen, despite the ruins which encumber the soil, and which, we are told, are the dry bones of vanished cities. And these are traces of civilizations which have not disappeared but have shifted from one place to another. In a land where the buildings are of earth, man migrates and abandons his abode more readily than elsewhere. Close beside the ruins, there are life and animation to be seen; Teheran, near Rages; Meshed, near Tous; and Shahroud, near Bostan.

But this is not the place to discuss such questions, and I should have said that we started from Teheran for Meshed on the 27th of April, in a whirlwind of dust. We leave to our right the ancient Reï with its battered walls, the white tower of the cemetery of the Guebres (fire-worshippers), who are in the habit of exposing their dead to the open air. We cross the low chain of mountains at the foot of which Reï is built, and from the summit of the pass, we cast a farewell glance at Teheran, spread out upon the plain, the white walls of the shah's residences being visible on the spurs of the mountains. Thence we descend to Meshed, the "pearl of Islam," as the Shiites call it. We pass a dome, glittering like that of the Invalides, and it is that of the large mosque of Shah-Abdul-Azid, beyond Reï. Though it is dark, we gallop across the steppe, and Capus is thrown from his horse, which stumbles in the obscurity, and strains his arms very badly. Fortunately, we are to join the van to-morrow.

To-day (April 28) no sign of any van, though we should be glad to continue our route, having got tired of contemplating Demawend, who has sported his turban. The chief of the station

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is a very amiable Kurd, and he tells us that his family has been at the station ever since the days of Nadir-Shah, and has always had the posting-house. He advises us to keep our patience, telling us that the road is in a bad condition, and that the vans must have been delayed.

Soon after, a foot-messenger comes in with a message from our attendant, asking us to follow the former. We cross, not without difficulty, the Kabut-Gumbaz river, which is much swollen, and has a very rapid current, and near the bank we see our clothes which have all been put out to dry, a horse badly hurt, and the van which has just been pulled out of the river, where it had upset. No great damage had been done, and we go by way of the steppe to Sherifabad. In the second van, which follows, perched upon the luggage, are three young mollahs, who come from the same country as the drivers. They have just completed their studies in the Medressés of Teheran, and they are about to set the seal upon them by a pilgrimage to the holy places—thereby earning from their co-religionists a higher opinion than young men as a rule can command.

April 29th.

We start for Eivani-Keif, which is a continuation of the bare and monotonous steppe, following the chain of the Elburz, and distinguishing to the left its last spurs, which look like sand furrowed by streams of water. The sun is already very scorching, as we follow a valley which narrows near Eivani-Keif, with a torrential river running through it. We do not lodge in the caravansary attributed to Shah-Abbas, but in a caravansary of the town, where we meet a young dancing man, who goes through a performance by comparison with which the dances of central Asia are chaste. We are agreed that we have never met so obscene a people as the Persians; this spectacle quite scandalizes the young mollahs, who at sunset had said long prayers, with

their foreheads resting upon a box which contained holy earth from Kerbela. It was there that Ali suffered martyrdom. The van-driver of these young mollahs, endeavours to ingratiate himself with them by his reverential attitudes, and when he has done his work, he tells his beads with a very devout air, but he is rather absent-minded, for every now and then he rubs the inside of his ear with them.

April 30th.

We go on, with the intention of encamping at Kishlak, about twenty-five miles away. For about a third of the distance we go through the Khevir steppe, which is covered with salt, while to our right the hills seem like heaps of sand that have preserved the impress of the waves of the sea which have evaporated and left them with a layer of salt. The heat is very great as we approach the mountains which bar the way before us, and which seem spangled with silver, while patches of gypsum reflect the rays of the sun.

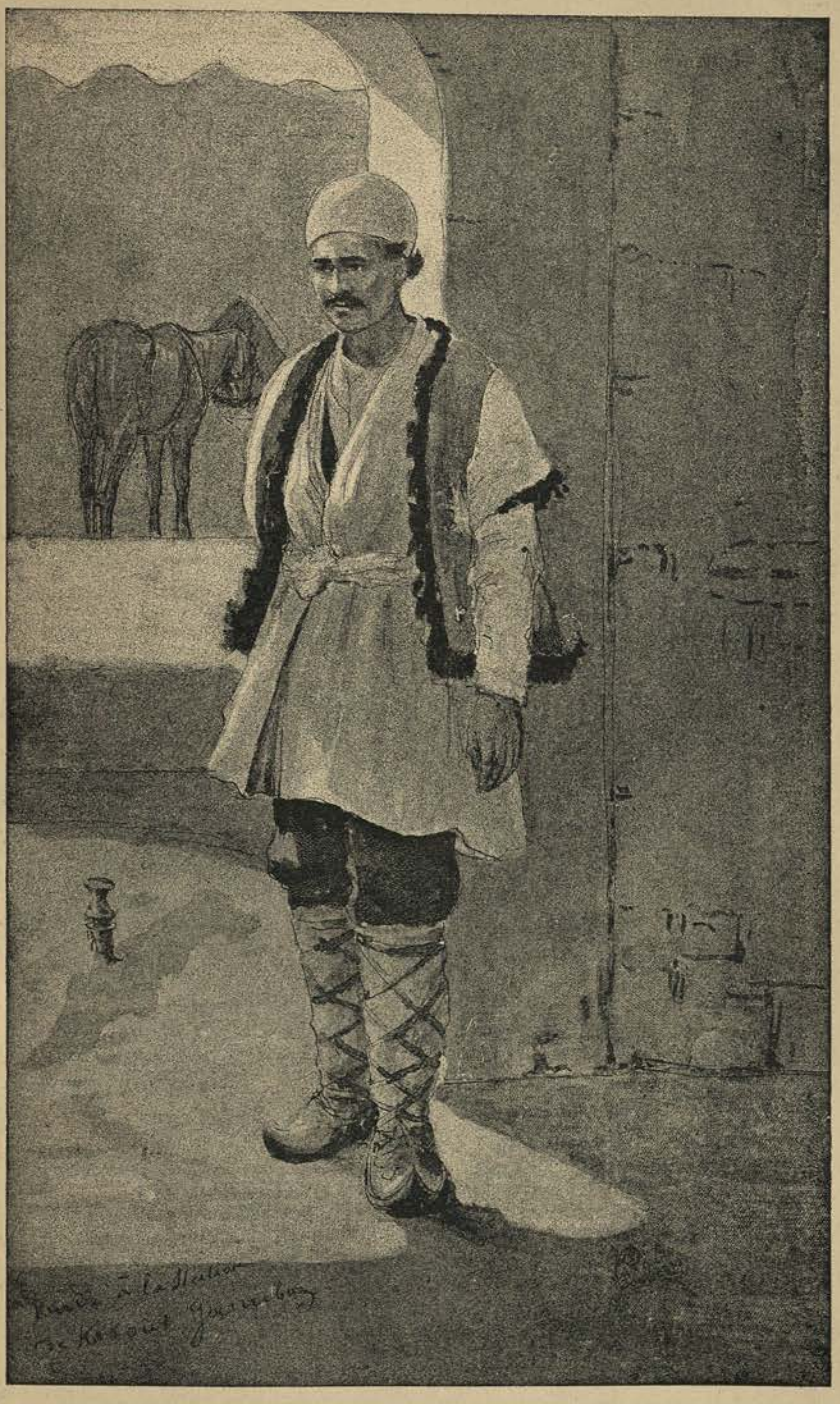
We find ourselves in a regular defile, undulating like a gigantic reptile along the bare mountains, which are streaked and hollowed out at their base by the rapid and muddy waters of the river, which are full of the crumbling earth. Our progress is delayed by the deep channels which the heavy rains have made, and it is as much as the eight horses can do, with all of us putting our shoulders to the wheel, to get the van across. The road is a very bad one, and the heat most trying; there is no vegetation, nothing but stones and salt. There is not a bit of shade save that of the telegraph poles, which strike you as an anachronism amid this savage and primitive nature. The river Tchaï threads its way along the valley, or defile, which is scarcely fifty feet broad, and the van, which has no other road to travel, jolts over the stones. Fortunately, this wooden vehicle gives, and it keeps its equilibrium where any other would upset.

In this region everything is motionless and dead except the water, which hurries off in haste from such a scene of desolation. But do not drink of it, for it is very salt. Such are the Caspian Pylæ, according to certain historians, though I myself believe that they are to be looked for elsewhere.

Upon emerging from this gorge we go down towards Kishlak, the wheels of our van breaking through the Khevir salt crust. To our left are still visible a chain of bare mountains, looking quite grey under the deep blue sky, while in the south, far away to the right, beyond the brilliant glitter of the plain, other undulating mountains are seen as in a mirage. Straight in front of us, before reaching the village, are a few square yards of cultivated ground and five or sick black tents belonging to nomads. Upon the ridge of the hills and along the canals for irrigating the land are to be seen some women in white veils working in the fields of green barley, and then we find our way into streets with garden walls on each side, above them being visible the top of a glacis and the battlements of a fortress.

It was time we did arrive, for the storm comes rushing down from the mountain, raising a cloud of dust which hides both sky and earth, and we had hardly got under the caravansary when the thunder began to roll and the tongues of flame to light up the sky. The women come down so quickly from the roofs that they seem to fall into the houses, and the young men hurry homewards with their flocks. The clouds are very high, and the wind drives them before it, so there is scarcely any rain and much ado about nothing. The northerly wind lasts, and it howls the whole night.

Our numbers increase every day, for the solitary travellers whom we meet join our caravan. They accompany the vans and do small jobs in return—lending a shoulder to the wheel, cleaning the plates and dishes, fetching water, etc., in return for which they are allowed to climb up behind and rest themselves when



A KURDISH POSTILION.

they are tired. Two of them afford us a good deal of amusement, one of them a Turk from Trebizond, a handsome young man of five and twenty, very brawny, jovial, and unconcerned, always ready to lend a hand, with a constant smile on his face, and calling to the horses when they are inclined to jib in such a loud tone that we cannot help laughing. He is styled "Hadji" because he has been to Mecca. He has travelled a good deal, but he rarely pronounces properly the names of towns, though he can write them correctly. He does not want to burden his head with useless knowledge.

"What is the good of it?" he says. "You read the books; you travel to look about you. I travel to find bread. When I have found it, I eat it, and when my work is done, I go to bed and sleep, because I am tired. I care little about anything else."

"Are you going to pray at the tomb of the Imam Riza at Meshed?"

Hadji smacks his tongue and shakes his head, saying—

"I have not even the time to pray; and, besides, I rarely think of doing so."

"Where are you going?"

"To Askhabad, to fetch ten tomans which are owing to me. I know there is a good deal of building going on there, and I am certain to find work."

"Is the old man you call the Baba also on the look-out for employment?"

"No fear of him! He is a Persian, whom I met before getting to Teheran, on his way from Kerbela to Meshed, where he is going to pray. This is how he spends his time. But when he is on the road, never a prayer does he say."

The Baba is a man of middle height, thin, with legs which do not know the meaning of fatigue, for he never gets up to ride a little way. At times he is pensive and gloomy; at others an

intolerable chatterer to himself. He eats opium and has a very sallow complexion and wild look. For all that, he is an excellent cook, and likes being over the saucepan, though he eats very little. He gets into a terrible passion when the fire does not burn properly, and when the fat does not melt quick enough; and if he is told that the rice is not properly cooked, he apostrophizes the rice and the saucepan in the funniest manner imaginable. He always visits his displeasure upon inanimate things.

BABA.

We have surnamed him "the philosopher," perhaps because he carries all his worldly goods in a bag; and his figure is one which really ought to be carved out in boxwood when he puts on his visor and twists it round his head in the direction of the sun.

May 1st.

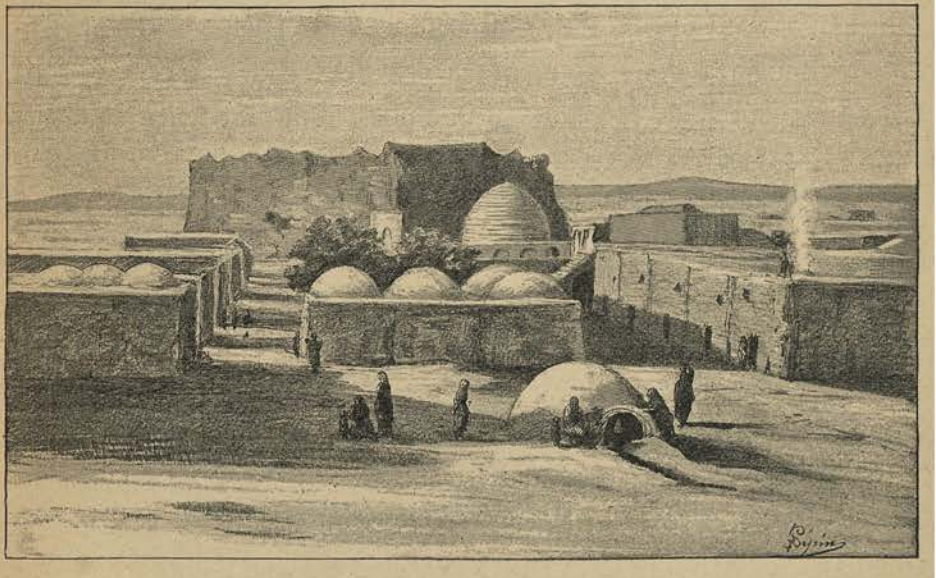
From Kishlak to Dehinemek (village of salt) the landscape remains unchanged, for the steppe still stretches in front of us, with the mountains to the left and the white strips of salt to the right. Upon nearing Ardaban, a village with a picturesque fortress, we begin to flounder among the irrigating canals.

As on the previous days, it is necessary to use the spade and fill up the ruts, for nothing has ever been done to keep these roads in order save by the sun and the wind. At the caravansary of Ardaban, Amman, our attendant, encounters one of his uncles, who is returning to Ardebil. He has come from Askhabad, where he has been employed upon the railway works, upon a capital little Kirghiz horse. It is his intention to stop at Teheran a little, and then return home by the mountain. He complains very much

EIVANI-KEIF—A BATCHA DANCE.

of the Persians, who sell him everything very dear, and never give him any change out of a piece of silver when he is alone.

After a pleasant halt under three mulberry-trees, we make a fresh start. We are brought to a stop upon leaving the village by a very deep watercourse, and it is found necessary to turn the water off and fill up the breach, so as to render the passage possible. We call in the aid of the inhabitants of a neighbouring village, and after two hours' hard work we get over. The villagers



DEHINEMEK.

only work under threat of punishment, and then very slowly—a promise of money not having had the slightest effect upon them. They seemed very much surprised when we did pay them at the end of it. We then found ourselves upon a stony plain, and before sunset we arrived at the "village of salt" on foot, leaving our vehicles behind us, to come on as best they could.

Dehinemek consists of fifteen or sixteen houses; and, as in all the villages we pass through on this dreary road, the inhabitants cultivate just enough land to feed their families, and sell flour,

barley, and forage to the passing pilgrims and travellers. They make very handsome profits in this way, and some of them are very well off. The whole of this region is one great bed of salt, which is visible everywhere—on the banks of the rivers, along the walls of the houses, and upon the very walls and bricks, while the the water one drinks is made sickly by it. We pass along by the most fertile portion of the Khevir, the soil of the plain being covered with a crust which rises like dough as it dries.

The village presents a rather animated scene in the morning, with the sound of the blacksmiths' forges, the shouts of the ploughmen urging on their oxen, cocks crowing, children crying, frogs croaking, and fowls cackling as they peck about for food. Women are spreading out their linen on the flat roofs, or going off, with their shoes down at heel, to the wheel, dressed in short blue petticoats, loose red jackets, with a many-coloured veil dropping over their shoulders. They are to be seen in the streets and roadway, dressing their children, some of whom are quite naked. I noticed one who was sitting upon his mother's knee while she picked the insects out of his hair and scratched his back, much to his manifest satisfaction, a mangy dog and a still more mangy donkey being mute spectators of the scene. A good many dogs are asleep on the roofs, the swallows just skimming over them, while the sparrows fly off to the green spots in the wheat-fields. Close to the caravansary, with its high brick walls, there is an ice-house and an abandoned fort, the latter recalling the days when there was constant danger of attack, and the former being a proof of how hot the climate is and that the garrison enjoyed cool drinks. The village is surrounded by solitudes like those we have previously traversed, and the mountains are still bare and arid, while the Khevir salt glistens in the distance.

This will never be more than a land of passage. The requirements of trade and the accidents of history have caused it to be

traversed by a road along which halting-places have of necessity been established, but nothing less than the imperious will of a king of kings could people the neighbourhood of the caravansaries, unless, indeed, it was the prospect of robbing the caravans and the pilgrims.

From Dehinemek, the road leads to Abdullah-Abad, and then to Lazguird, a village perched upon a hill, noted only for its immodest women and its delicious pomegranates. So Sadik, the conductor of our vehicle, is very fond of Lazguird. Sadik is a small Tartar, very lithe and vigorous, with no eyes to speak of, and a large nose; always vociferating to his groom Ali; insolent, rough of speech, noisy, and reckless; very full of fun, very dirty, and devoted to his Cabardian horses. He is the antithesis of his friend Abbas, who is portly and sedate, with the pretension of being very well dressed, walking with his head thrown back, and with his turban on one side, whereas Sadik wears his on the back of his head. At Lazguird, Sadik, stimulated thereto by the young mollahs, his compatriots, makes up his mind to say his prayers. He has been told that Khorassan is very close, that he will soon arrive at Meshed, and that it would please the Imam Riza that he (Sadik) should fulfil the duties of his religion. So Sadik settles himself, with bare feet, into one of the large niches in which travellers sleep outside the caravansaries. He spreads out a small piece of carpet, and begins a prayer. But what a prayer it is! While he is mumbling very fast, he scratches his head and takes a look at his groom Ali, suddenly calling out to him, "Give the grey horse more straw. Curry the quarters of the white mare." He continues his prayer, scratches himself

SADIK.

more energetically than before, blows up Ali a third time, and then, getting tired of so much piety, and taking advantage of the temporary absence of the mollahs, gets up before he is through his prayer, proffers a sigh, utters imprecations upon the Imam Riza, pulls out his pipe, fills it, and lights up with an air of satisfaction as of one who has done his duty.

In the Simnan bazaar, we meet men of Turkish race who come from the shores of the Caspian; one of them is of fair complexion, so Russia is not far off.

After having crossed the stream, with many mills along its banks, which supplies Simnan with water, the road ascends through a bare and mountainous steppe. There is no trace of vegetation upon the heights, which are a regular desert. Our stage is a long one, and we break it by a halt near a small spring from which ripples a tiny stream of water, flowing down the hillside and forming a grateful belt of green on each of its banks. The nor'-wester brings us a little rain, and we go on, the rain still falling, as far as Aouvan, which lies hidden in a valley. Near the caravansary rises an abandoned fortress, in which the shepherds have for many years been in the habit of placing their flocks to protect them from bad weather, and the dung has accumulated in thick layers, from which saltpetre is extracted by men who have established their factory by the roadside, in the open air. These saltpetre-makers are nomad, and during the summer they go from place to place, wherever they can find materials to work upon.

Holes made in the earth serve as vats and boilers, and they excavate beneath these holes an oven, in which they make their fires. The steppe supplies them with firing in the shape of brushwood, and they form a wall to protect themselves from the wind by piling up this brushwood behind the heaps of compost which is to make the saltpetre. Their method is as follows:

First they soak it for twenty-four hours, then filter it, then boil it for another twenty-four hours, then cleanse the boiled residue by placing it in reservoirs, and finally let the sun evaporate the water. They make in a day about fifty pounds (English), which they sell for a penny a pound. They express themselves as being quite satisfied with the result of their work, which, as two middle-aged

A CARAVANSARY.

men, with five of their children around them, tell us, has been carried on by their family for a very long period.

At Lazguird we had been told that the Turkomans were the terror of Eastern Persia, from Khorassan to Aouvan. Some shepherds tells us that the Yumud Turkomans had recently stolen eight hundred sheep, and if the figures are exaggerated, the fact itself is probable enough. These are episodes in the struggle still going on between Turan and Iran.

After leaving Aouvan we make a steep ascent, and then down hill again, going from one basin to another by a sort of waste-weir, so to speak.

The sea is not far off, and this is why to our left the sky is paler on account of the moisture, and the horizon is lined with grey clouds, while but for a strong north-west wind the outlines of the mountain would not be so distinct. There is no variety in the scenery as far as Kacha, where we encounter some Afghans. They describe themselves as servitors of Ayub-Khan, and are on their way to Teheran. They are men of proud mien, not at all like the Persians.

After Kacha comes Daouletabad. One has only to get a distant view of Daouletabad to perceive that one has got into the province of Khorassan, and that the Turkomans are close at hand. The village bristles with fortifications, and nothing has been neglected to guard against attack and secure the safety of the inhabitants by a multiplication of walls and towers.

Daouletabad is made up of a square fortress facing north, and of the long rectangle of gardens and cultivated fields to the south.

The fortress consists of a deep ditch and three parallel lines of crenulated walls, with four towers at the four corners, these towers increasing in height the further they are from the ditch. Entering this fortress through two gateways, one after the other, both defended by double towers, one notices that low houses and stables are built up against the walls, so that the inhabitants and cattle may be placed there when an attack is apprehended. In the centre of the fortress are the residences intended for the chief, his wives, his servants, and his soldiers. The present khan has not a very warlike aspect, being a man with an enormous stomach, whom his corpulency has made rather asthmatic. He can neither read nor write, but he tells us that he is "a descendant of the builder of the fortress, Motallib-Khan, who lived in the early

part of the century. His brother was called Zulfagar-Khan, and I am his son."

He is busy fitting up and restoring his abode, but he is not building up the crumbling walls nor putting the gates in a state of defence, for nothing has been seen of the Turkomans for twenty years. And as the heat is extreme, on this day, May 7th, the thermometer is 113° F. in the sun—our good friend, dressed in a very airy costume, is closely superintending the construction of a high tower, the use of which we do not at first understand. It

DAOULETABAD.

cannot be a watch-tower, for the country is in a peaceful state, and there is no staircase to the top.

The khan, who is bathed in perspiration, says that it is a ventilator.

The fortress has only one entrance. On the small square, access to which was formerly closed, several tradespeople have opened shops, in which they sell miscellaneous goods and tea. Their booths are erected against the wall which encloses the gardens and cultivated fields, from which the inhabitants gain

their means of existence, thanks to a shallow stream of potable water. Now that all fear of attack has disappeared, the walls of the enclosure are allowed to fall into disrepair, and the inhabitants have even been tempted to cultivate the open ground, living in the gardens by preference to the fortress, where they had not much breathing-space.

Our day's journey terminates at Damgan, which precedes the ruins. Inside the town there are a few monuments, some minarets, attributed to the Sultan Hussein, a mosque, also in ruins, said to have been built by Shah-Rukh, the son of the Emir Timour. It is an insignificant town, with narrow and dirty streets, but it is associated with the names of Timour and Shah-Rukh, which is a sign that we are approaching the Turan country. Moreover, after leaving Damgan, the mountains to our left get lower and lower. At the extremity of the chain, Chirabad might be discerned on a clear day. This reminds us of Turkestan; and before us spread the plain, the salt fields, and the arid steppe. However, to the right of the road we can see two or three hamlets, some greenery, and various signs of life. A white eagle is hovering in the air, so there must be some birds for it to prey upon; and soon after we see some pigeons, rooks, and larks; while nearer to the ground are ants and other insects, with lizards to devour them.

Looking in the direction of the cultivated fields, we can see, between them and the mountain, a row of orifices extending almost in a straight line. They are the mouths of the karys, those veins which may be said to float down their streams life in the midst of death. I need hardly explain that a karys is an underground canal, by means of which a spring is secured and conveyed to a piece of low ground that has been brought into cultivation. The course of the karys is perforated with shafts, through which the soil is removed when it is being constructed or cleaned. The *débris* is heaped up around the openings, which have the appear-

ance of a succession of craters, but craters which do not vomit forth any lava and from which a delightful coolness is emitted.

In order that the caravan men may be able to draw water for themselves and their animals, charitable persons, or governors with a certain amount of foresight, have in some places had built, near the roadside, an arched staircase leading down to the underground stream. Travellers halt at these spots, where they find, when they require it, a shelter in the house of the keeper of the building,

DAMGAN.

who will also supply them with provisions, if they care to pay a high price for them. Such is the case at Kurian, where we made a halt.

There is a staircase at Kurian going down a depth of nearly fifty feet, with very high and awkward steps, but they lead to a spring of very cold water. One passes from the furnace above ground into complete shade, and then, sitting upon the lowest step, one feels that one is quaffing ambrosia—for ambrosia must certainly have been spring water—and that one would

willingly dig for months into the bowels of the earth if one could be sure of opening a way for this treasure of liquid pearls, which moistens the earth and arrays it in greenery and harvests, while all around the pitiless sun is burning up the ground.

From Kurian we go on to Dehimollah, where we are to pass the night. Before arriving there we have to climb a hill and clear several ravines, and while Abbas, the first van driver, gets over safely, our man Sadik gets stuck in the mud.

WELLS.

We ask him why he did not follow the same route as Abbas, instead of trusting to chance.

"What is the use of so many precautions?"

"Because you would have less trouble."

"Well, the roads are as it were an image of life."

"I do not quite follow you."

"Vallah! I speak truly. Roads are the image of life. Whether they are good or bad, one must follow them to the end; whether you are rich or poor, you will see out the end of your days."

After this, we have no choice but to go on foot to our caravansary; it is some little distance from the village, so it is advisable to send in there for some drinking water.

The place is crowded with Tartar and Arab pilgrims, women, and merchants. Several dervishes came to beg, and get anything but a pleasant reception from Sadik and Hadji. The "Baba" himself grumbles not a little at seeing these men put out their hands to us for alms when he himself has not got all he wants.

One gradually gets accustomed to this nomad kind of life, and when the vermin are not too plentiful, the nights pass pleasantly.

It is nice, when rolled up in one's blankets, to watch the stars as they glitter above the walls, while thoughts flit through the brain more rapidly than the clouds driven before the storm. There is a certain feeling of repose derived from hearing the dogs as they prowl about, and the wind chanting the grand and simple music of nature, while even the snoring of your tired companions is not altogether unpleasant. You see a pair of bright eyes gleaming; it is a cat coming after food. The horses, half asleep, munch their fodder with a regular motion of the jaws, and the mules, as they turn over from side to side, rattle their bells. Then, again, those who enjoy the fresh air get up before it is light, having gone to rest before the sun went down. The lanterns are seen crossing the yard like wills-o'-the-wisp, and the muleteers are running to and fro after their animals which have got loose, shouting to and swearing at one another. At last the mules are loaded, farewells are exchanged, and amid many "salamats," the caravan starts on its journey, the drivers gradually calming down, and the bells ceasing to tinkle.

The large door opens and creaks on its hinges, when there is one, as at Dehimollah; a light crosses the courtyard. This is probably the superintendent of the caravansary going back to bed after a tour of inspection.

In their turn the van-drivers get up in order to groom their horses, and the curry-combs are heard as they pass them over the animals' quarters with a sound like that of raking stones, while the stallions neigh and plunge, regardless of the alternate coaxing and threats of the stablemen.

Then, perhaps, one may have to drive off another cat which has come prowling after the meat, and finally you get to sleep.

The road continues to be quite as monotonous, but the plain has a physiognomy of its own. You fancy that you know where you are and that you are about to see again spots which you have already visited. You think that there is a town down below there, at the elbow of the mountains. Going further on you see below a valley reminding you of the approach to Teheran. You make the descent, and you remark that there is a great deal of animation, people working in the fields, carriages (arabas), gardens surrounded with walls, canals, a cool breeze, men wearing turbans, not so many black head-dresses and more small Turkish eyes than before, a stronger and better-fed race, living upon a fertile soil.

A PERSIAN GIRL.

The town is intersected by a large stream, there are several caravansaries, a bazaar full of animation, a busy trade, English and Russian goods, and Armenians, who are to be met with everywhere in Persia where money is to be made. The very fact of their presence would almost suffice to prove that Shahroud is a town in which plenty of business is transacted.

It is true that these Armenians are chiefly engaged in selling

TARTAR PILGRIM.

the wine and alcohol which they make themselves, and that, in accordance with their precise numbers, one might infer as to how many drunkards there were in the town.

Shahroud is upon the trade route for merchants coming from Russia by way of the Caspian Sea and Asterabad. Its situation is a good one geographically; there is no lack of water, and the town is the converging point of many roads, for, whether you are coming from the west, the north, the east, or Afghanistan, you must pass through Shahroud, and the sea is not far off.

It is easy to see that a sense of security now reigns in the Khorassan, for the fortress is falling into ruins. The ditch is being converted into gardens, and now that there is no longer anything to be feared from the Turkomans, the town is extending. People are selecting the best places for building and cultivating the ground, whereas formerly they selected the safest, always assuming that there was water. The sense of danger made them huddle close together. It is interesting to observe and easy to see that the natives of the Khorassan had mainly in view, when laying out their towns and villages, their protection from the Turkomans. They studiously avoided all places where a surprise could easily be effected, perching themselves upon heights which commanded a good view of the horizon, in preference to the amphitheatre of the mountains from which there were not many issues. This, no doubt, was the chief reason for the abandoning of Bostan, the neighbouring town, which is overlooked by heights, which is reached by deep defiles, and which is deficient in exits. Whereas Shahroud is upon the ridge of the plain, and there is no lack of space.

Bostan is a good hour's journey distant. It is situated in a circular valley about six miles in diameter, shut in by mountains with several depressions which admit of a passage through them.

And if the Greek Πύλαι is taken to mean defiles, this must be the site of the Hecatompylos of the ancients.

Bostan is at present no more than a petty village surrounded by walls, its houses grouped around a pretty mosque and a tottering minaret. We are not allowed to visit the mosque, because we are infidels; but, upon the other hand, we are permitted to ascend the minaret about thirty feet, which is as far as we care to go, for it is very unsteady. The postilion who accompanies the horses which we have borrowed for this little excursion is very loquacious, and he is full of stories about the Turkomans of whom I speak to him. He can remember the terror of the population when their approach was announced. No one ventured to leave the place, especially at Bostan. The gates of the town were closed, and a watch for them was kept from the top of the walls, the inhabitants only breathing freely again when they had disappeared.

They often carried off flocks, and women, and children. The people who had occasion to travel in the direction of the Atruck, took every possible precaution beforehand. They were careful to provide their horses with shoes and nails purchased from the Turkomans, and when they reached dangerous passes, where an ambuscade might be looked for, they put their horses into a gallop.

The greatest danger was to be apprehended from the plunderers who came in small numbers on speedy horses. It was impossible to capture them, as they had no difficulty in concealing themselves, and in twenty-four hours they got over a great deal of ground. When I point out to my interlocutor that Shahroud is a large town, that the Persians are strong in numbers, that their army is a large one, and that it would be easy to pay these Turkomans back in their own coin, he tells me that no one had ever thought of doing this, that a few troops with guns were occasionally sent out to encamp near Bostan, but that this was of no use, as the Turkomans waited till they were gone.

Patriotism does not exist in this country, and the inhabitants do not seem to possess that kind of instinct of self-preservation which is the characteristic of nations with any life in them, and from which is derived that spirit of initiative, which in turn leads people to seek a remedy for evil, to band themselves together and be of good cheer; to put upon one side, in the hour of danger, individual interests, and think only of those of the country. At times like these, man, instead of wrapping himself up in his egotism, rushes forward to the defence of a flag or a frontier;

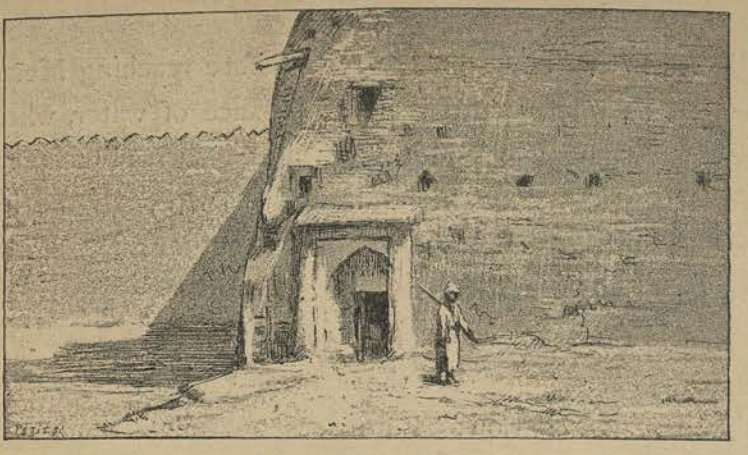
GIPSIES.

but the Persians have never been attacked with this "sublime fever."

Outside the walls of Bostan and Shahroud, we see a number of gipsy encampments. These gipsies tell us that they are natives of Seistan, and that they gain their living by making brass-wire, and working on metals. They are tributaries of the chief of the shah's running footmen (Tchater-Bachi), to whom each family pays an annual sum of fourteen krans (about nine shillings).

They live either in tents or in huts made of mud, with a felt roof.

When they move their camp, they roll up their roof and carry it off with them. They are never slow to beg, and they look upon us as very fair game, the old women of the tribe coming to us with outstretched hands, though not until they have taken the precaution of throwing some live coals on to the ground to propitiate the fates. They are of very much the same type as the natives, with the exception that they are dirtier; more swarthy, for they live in the open air; and thinner, because their table is not a plentiful one.



ENTRANCE TO THE VILLAGE OF SADERABAD.

CHAPTER V.

FROM BOSTAN TO MESHED.

The land and water—Expatriated radishes—Abundance of water at Sabzevar—Consecutive upsets—A Persian emigrant—His views—No *res publica*—The caravansary in the day time—The Arabs—The witch of Endor—Diplomacy—The print of Imam's footstep—The fear of Turan—The watch towers—The Turkomans as slave dealers—Persian pusillanimity—Before the holy city of the Shiites—Religious enthusiasm—Its various manifestations—"Distance lends enchantment to the view."

May 12th.

THE spring is coming, and the steppe is all in flower, but this does not suffice to break the monotony of the route. The horses are bleeding at the neck and near the shoulder; several small veins burst, and this is a natural blood-letting, which will do the poor beasts good. They may well be congested after so many long marches in the sun, without a drop of water. Our van-driver says that it is because they want to eat fresh grass, after having been fed so long on barley and dry hay. The same thing is noted in Algeria.

We are twelve hours on the road before reaching Meïamei, a pleasant oasis where there is an abundance of water, where the mulberry-trees, poplars and willows afford such abundant shade that one may fancy one's self in paradise, though the infernal regions, as represented by the steppe, are not far off.

At less than a mile from Miandecht, we see the ruins of a fortress, said to date from the time of Shah-Ismail.

One might imagine that the men of this country would like to migrate, but imperious nature does not allow them a choice of dwellings, and thus they build. One circumstance urges them to go away, while another prompts them to return, and so they leave ruins close to the water, from which in no case can they move far away. They are prisoners tied to a long but very stout chain, and the links of it are closely soldered.

From Miandecht we get to Alhak, halting near a fortified caravansary in ruins and a rivulet of salt water. The few woe-begone inhabitants of the hamlet come to see us. Their existence is a pastoral one. When they are not abusing one another, they spin some poor kind of rope out of old pieces of felt. They are very kindly disposed, and are anxious to offer us a treat by giving us something of European origin. So they bring us a few green stems, which, if there was any root at the end of them, would be radishes. We look at the man who brings them to us as much as to ask what they are, and he, much surprised at our ignorance, begins to munch the leaves, and says, with an air of superiority, "This is how you eat them."

LITTLE GIRL AT ABBAS-ABAD.

As we emerge from the hills, we catch sight of the caravansary of Abbas-Abad, and to the right is a vast sheet of white, which

might be taken for snow, though in reality it is the Khevir salt shining in the sunlight.

At Abbas-Abad, we give a few medical consultations, among others, to a Persian who has been stabbed in the hand while disputing with some Tartar pilgrims about payment for a measure of barley.

The caravansary of Saderabad is in a very tumbledown state. Opposite to it is a ruined village fortress, inhabited by people of Asterabad, who had been brought there to defend the fortress, keep the cisterns in order, get forage ready, and lend a hand to the caravan men and pilgrims. In return, the government paid each of the ten families seven tomans (a toman is worth about 7*s.* 6*d.*) a year, and a hundred measures of flour. But the government does not keep its word, for though it sometimes pays the money, it never provides the flour, and the poor wretches are in deep distress. They live like lizards in the midst of ruins, and whenever one of them finds an opportunity of seeking fortune elsewhere, he disappears for good. So their number is decreasing every day.

A SPINNER AT SADERABAD.

We go to pass the night at the new Mazinan, standing rather higher than the old village, which was destroyed by a flood about twenty years ago. The ruins of the abandoned village seem several centuries old; the houses are built of earth containing a certain quantity of salt, and as they are exposed to very severe frosts, to furious winds, and a pitiless sun, they soon fall to pieces.

After leaving Mazinan, there is less salt, and we renew acquaintance with the saxaoul, a shrub which has been of great service to us in the Ust-Urt. What an excellent fire we make with this shrub! At Sutkar, the caprices of fortune throw other

acquaintances in our path, viz. Afghans, conducting Ayub-Khan's wives to Teheran. Exile has not abated the pride of these men, who think so much of their descent; they are disdainful and insolent to the natives, as if they were in a conquered country.

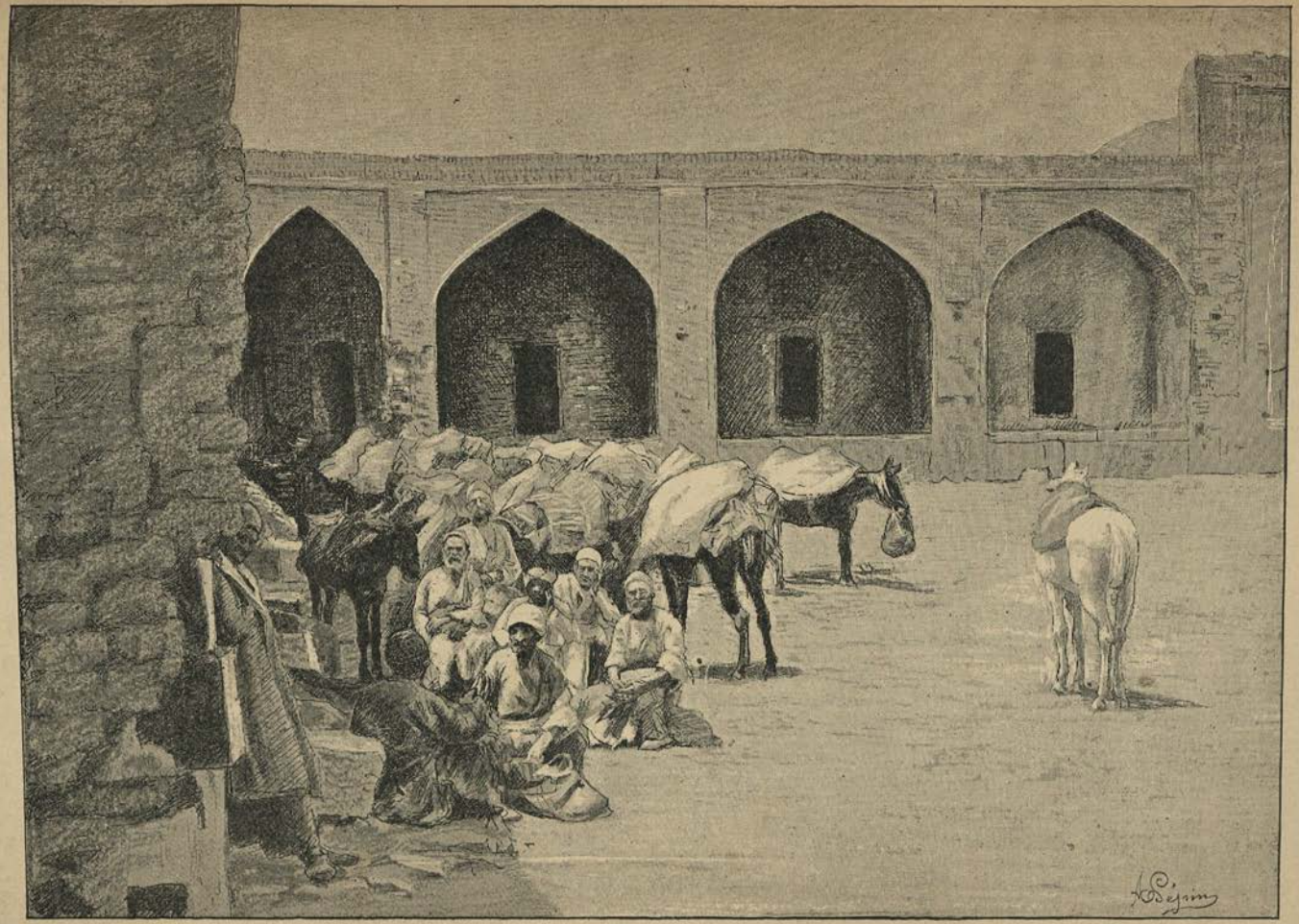
From Sutkar, we go to spend the night near an *abambar* (water cistern), in a ruined caravansary. The next day sees us at Sabzevar, on a fertile plain bounded to the north by the mountain. There is an abundance of water, the karys are numerous, and the villages surrounded by cultivated fields, while there are water-courses by the roadside. We notice many fields of poppies, a proof that opium is made and sold. So the rich countries provide the poor ones with the means of intoxication. The population is mainly Persian, but the race is a heavier one than in the west.

As the caravansary where we are to pass the night is in the east of the town, we go through the narrow street of the bazaar, where our vehicle has only just room to pass, causing a good deal of alarm to the shopkeepers, who are afraid that their goods and trays will be upset. They may well be anxious, for the enormous van rolls to and fro upon the rough pavement, just grazing the doors and windows, and threatening to crush people right and left.

We sleep in the caravansary, which is crowded with pilgrims and merchants, for there have been a great many travellers about since we have been upon this high road from the East to the West, which makes a bend at Shahroud towards Asterabad and the Caspian.

The caravansary is surrounded by tombs, and has not a comparison often been made between a caravansary and human life?

From Sabzevar to Rabat-Sarpuch there is an abundance of water, but it is salt, as Hadji has an opportunity of discovering at Hussein-Abad, before reaching Rabat. We had gone some way



PILGRIMS AND MULETEERS.

from the van in order to look at a field of poppies, where men were feeling the heads in order to see if it was time to extract the sap. A limpid stream was flowing at the roadside, and as Hadji was thirsty he asked some old men with beards half white from age, half red from henna, whether it was good. They declared, "by Allah, that it was excellent."

Hadji then took a draught, but soon spat it out in disgust, and began to curse the old men for deceiving him, declaring that "Persians could never speak the truth even when they were white-bearded."

I never could understand this peculiar fondness for lying, so characteristic of Persians and many other Eastern races. It is, perhaps, inherent in the nature of man, to whom the naked truth is distasteful, owing to an aberration of mind analogous to those aberrations of taste peculiar to stomachs which have been upset by over-indulgence, or which are naturally weak or susceptible of singular appetites, as in the case of many children.

Upon the 19th, after being jolted along the rough steppe, which was powdered over with a sprinkling of salt or saline growths, we reached some hills preceded by a ravine, which is not particularly steep, and along which trickles a rivulet of brackish water. The first van passes without any difficulty, but as ours, which is the second, climbs up the hill, with Sadik quietly smoking his pipe and holding the reins very loosely, I notice that we are going too much to the right. I observe this to Sadik, but he tells me that it is "all right." No sooner has he said so than the van sways over, with Sadik and a heavy chest toppling on to me. I find myself thrown against the side of the van, which has turned over, and a counter-shock forces me back under the pole, between the horses' legs, from which I extricate myself with remarkable rapidity. Turning round I find that Capus has disappeared beneath the baggage, while Pepin is caught hand and foot; the

servants perched up behind had had time to jump off. We extricate the others as quickly as possible, but while Pepin was a good deal bruised, Capus was intact, and Sadik had not even smashed his pipe. The baggage is picked up out of the mud, the bruises are washed, and, after drinking a cup of tea, we make a fresh start. Sadik gets so well lectured, that he appeals to the devil, to Mahomet, and to the Imam Riza, and declares he will be more careful.

But at the next ravine we come to the same thing happens, the only difference being that Pepin, despite his bruises, manages to jump off in time, while I feel a good deal bruised about the thigh and the chest. However, we continue our journey in the direction of Churab, which is only twelve or fourteen miles off. I have as one of my travelling companions a tall young man from Hamadan, who is full of life and spirits, and who is delighted at leaving his native country, as he tells me on the way. We go up and down some very sandy hills, and when the easterly wind does not blind us with dust we chat together.

The young man from Hamadan is very loquacious, and he informs me that he is a mason and bricklayer by trade, that chance had taken him to Tiflis, where he was not long in discovering that Russia was a nice country to live in, and that when he returned home with some small savings he determined to start off again as soon as possible. So he sold a small property which belonged to him, and left home one fine morning under the pretext of going to pray at the tomb of the Imam Riza at Meshed. In reality he intends going into the Transcaspian district, where he is sure of obtaining work, as a great deal of building is going on since the Russians came into the country, and he is an excellent workman. He carries all his fortune in Russian notes, in a small pocket sewn into his shirt. He remarks with a laugh that it is not heavy to carry and much handier than the krans.

THE FIRST UPSET BEFORE REACHING CHURAB.

"Why," I ask him, "is there no paper money in Persia?"

"The Persians are too stupid."

"You are a Persian; why do you speak ill of your country?"

"I am not a Persian; I am from Hamadan. Those who govern are at Teheran."

The poor fellow does not understand the idea of nationality which is current in Europe. He is from Hamadan, and he does not get beyond that; and he does not see that he is of Persian nationality because he speaks the Persian language. What has he in common with the people of Teheran? Why, nothing at all. His interest lies outside the frontier, and he has no hesitation in going across it.

"Can you sing like this?" he says. And thereupon he howls loud enough to deafen one, and asks if he sings nicely.

I reply, "Barek Allah! You sing like a *bulbul* (nightingale)."

"Russki. I understand Russian."

"Yes; Russki; that is it."

"Da (yes), khleb (bread), vada (water), dienghi (money). A very good thing, money."

"But you could make money in Persia."

"Here? (with an air of disdain). Look at the earth, it is salt; taste the water, it is salt; the roads are so bad that the vehicles upset; wages are low; the soldiers are thieves; the valis (governors) are thieves."

"And his majesty the shah?"

"He is no good either." And he jumps about with an agility which shows that, if no respecter of persons, he is very active on the leg.

Green fields of wheat in the bottom of the valley indicate our approach to Churab (salt water). There must be inhabitants close by, as we see that there is food growing to feed them.

A very remarkable trait in the Persian character, which I again have an opportunity of noticing at Churab, while we are consoling ourselves for the day's mishaps with an incalculable quantity of tea and milk, is indifference—for others, of course—or particularism, as it is called. Mutual help is not a maxim which regulates the conduct of the people in this country. They witness the misfortunes of others with the utmost tranquillity; they never take any one's part unless they are directly interested, for in their eyes to be weak is to be ridiculous. A muleteer overwhelms with insults an unfortunate woman who is returning from Meshed, where she has been to bury her son in holy ground, refusing to take her any further, despite his bargain, unless she gives him as much extra, upon the plea that it is very hot and that the dust is intolerable. This woman is all alone, but not one of the thirty people in all the caravan thinks of taking her part. She is in the right, but she is weak; so they only laugh at her. Several consequential persons seated beside her go on smoking their ghalyan stolidly, and let the muleteer make off without saying a word to him. The woman remains in the caravansary, and she will get away as best she can. One can understand, by the light of facts like these, that there can be no such thing as a *res publica*, where people never concern themselves about others.

From Churab, where, despite its name, excellent drinking water is to be had, we start with the intention of sleeping at Nichapur. After three hours' march, we reach Zumanabad by an undulating steppe dotted with hillocks. This miserable village is, like all the others in this region, surrounded by walls, and it is built after the same plan as the hamlet-fortresses of the Khorassan, that is to say, almost in a square, with turrets at each corner and upon both sides of the gateway. Cavities underground serve as a courtyard for the stock, the ground floor of the houses built against the walls as a stable, and the first floor as a residence for

the poverty-stricken people who cultivate the poor land outside the walls.

I go on in advance in company with a young fellow from Teheran, who has been employed to help Ali the groom. We settle down in the shade under the wall of the guard-room, just in front of the gate, and after having got a stoop of sour milk to quench my burning thirst, no water being obtainable, I have some talk with my young companion. He is about fifteen, and cannot remember having had any parents; he has always lived in the bazaar, begging and stealing, and in appearance he is lanky, badly marked with smallpox, and full of vermin.

"Why are you going to Meshed?"

"To pray at the tomb of the Imam Riza."

"You are a good Mussulman, then?"

"Yes, a very good Mussulman, Vallah!"

"But I have never seen you say a *namaz* (prayer); how is that?"

He begins to laugh, and when I press him further for his reasons, he admits that he does not know, but that he is anxious for a change of air.

The few inhabitants of Zumanabad form a circle around me, and my young companion very complacently explains to them all about me.

Beyond Zumanabad, we come to a bridge, and upon examining its condition, we arrive at the conclusion that the chances of upsetting or getting safe across are about even. Our reckless driver, Sadik, determines to chance it, and, by a piece of good luck, gets safe across. This does not induce his companion to do the same, so he unloads his waggon, and half of the villagers are employed for quite an hour in taking the goods, some of which are very heavy, to the other side. After punishment has been administered to two of the men who have stolen clothes belonging to the

mollahs, the waggons are loaded again, and we resume our tiresome route.

At nightfall, we get to Nazerabad, where we encounter two travellers from Europe, one a very tall man, the other of middle height. The former is a correspondent of the *Standard*, the second an American bicyclist. Both of them have attempted to enter Afghanistan, and they are both returning, anything but pleased, to Europe, by Asterabad and the Caucasus. Raleigh, the correspondent of the *Standard*, says that he shall await the declaration of war by Greece, which, he observes with a smile, is imminent, and Stevens, the bicyclist, is going to embark for Bombay, whence he will travel on his machine across India. Our two new companions have come on foot from Nichapur, whence they had started in the evening with their waggon. It is quite dark, and there is no sign of the waggon, so we give them a share of our dinner and blankets, and the next morning they start for Asterabad and we for Meshed. The American is on his bicycle, but he will have to carry it on his back very frequently, for the canals and watercourses intersect the road in so many places.

From Nazerabad to Nichapur, the country is well cultivated, and upon approaching the town, the wind brings us the odour of the poppies which we can see swaying to and fro like velvet cloths with brilliant tints on them. There is plenty of water, that in the streams being salt, while that in the karys is excellent. Nichapur is surrounded, like Sabzevar, by ruined walls, and protected by a broad ditch. The bazaar is full of life, like all those beyond Shahrud, the merchants in it having a large stock of English and Russian cotton stuffs, Russian and English needles, Russian and French sugar, and Angoulême writing-paper, these being the only French goods I came across, and Russian sugar is gradually pushing the French out of the market. The mercery goods are either Persian, German, or Austrian, with French trade marks.

The matches are of Austrian make. There is a native supply of felts, neither very well made or substantial, with printed stuffs of a very common pattern. There are a great many druggists, whose wares are of various origin: from Europe, India, and Turkestan. There is also a great demand for talismans. The natives manufacture objects of daily use or sell products of the country, such as rice, corn, opium, barley, and tobacco. Add to this a great number of Arab pilgrims in the streets, assailed by loquacious Persian shopkeepers, and you will get a fair idea of what this and other bazaars are like.

THE ENTRANCE TO NICHAPUR.

We go to lodge at a caravansary situated to the east of the town. It is very large and very dirty, but we are given the state rooms, on the first floor above the shops, well out of the sun and fairly free of vermin. From noon to two o'clock, we enjoy the pleasure of a siesta, and we are not the only ones who do the same.

The caravansary, just before so noisy, is now very quiet. Under the porch a number of people are stretched out at full length in various postures, all of them asleep, except a child of about ten, a deformed being, naked to the skin, who is lying on

his back, with his dropsical stomach baking in the sun. The shopkeeper opposite takes advantage of the lull in business to dye his beard black, and his next door neighbour, a vendor of wood and barley, combs his scanty locks, waters his vegetables, mops his forehead with his sleeve, and retires to the back of his premises; the vendor of tea, seated beside his extinguished urn, goes off to sleep, with his head between his legs; close beside him, his son, lying upon his stomach, is asleep on the bricks, feeling every now and then—in his dreams, let us hope!—for a flea, or worse. The animals imitate the human beings: donkeys, mules, and horses are asleep, either lying down or standing up, and flick the flies off with their tails in a mechanical sort of way. The only sound is the buzzing of the flies, an occasional tinkling of the bells on the animals' necks when they turn in their sleep, the twitter of a swallow as it flits through the air, or the flapping of the cloth velarium suspended over the doorway as a protection from the sun.

A PILGRIM DRINKING TEA.

In course of time, every one wakes up again; the Arabs come to make their purchases, gliding into the shops like phantoms clad in a dirty shroud; but they are phantoms who make a terrible din. There is a medley of harsh and guttural voices; the discussion waxes very warm, and is accompanied by gestures made by long bony arms which emerge from the burnouses, and the fingers at the extremity of which are black with dirt. The question in dispute is a halfpenny worth of barley or a few bits of

wood, the purchaser declaring that he has not got his money's worth, and the vendor that he has given too much. At last, the bargain is struck. The phantom pulls out his purse and slowly takes from it some bad coins which the shopkeeper strikes against the ground and refuses to accept. The purchaser pretends to examine them, and to be much surprised to find that they are not good ones. Then he puts them back and takes out some good money, which is duly accepted. As soon as he has gone, another customer arrives, and the same scene is enacted.

It is true that the Persians sell barley mixed with earth and stones, and that after they have weighed it, their customer is obliged to weigh it again, as they put their feet upon the bottom of the scales to bring them down. It is true that the wood is green and will emit only smoke; the bread is generally swollen out with water, and made of bad flour. But these Arabs are never satisfied, they are always complaining of the quality of the goods, and think the prices are too high; they insist upon choosing for themselves, and cleaning their barley themselves.

Here, for instance, I notice an old man who is discussing for ten minutes about twopennyworth of barley, who gives it back, and has his money returned to him; as he goes off, muttering between his teeth, when passing in front of the tea-vendor's shop, with a swoop rapid as that of a hawk, he seizes, with his hooked fingers, a bit of sugar and walks away, dignified for all his rags. His wife comes up to resume negotiations about the barley. She is very tall, very angular and thin, the bones of her chin, nose, and cheeks seem to be coming through her skin, which is parched like that of a mummy, while her shoulder-blades protrude under the dark frieze of her dress like the extremities of a gibbet. She reminds one of the witch of Endor.

When she gets in front of the sacks of barley, she suddenly

subsides into a recumbent position, reminding one of a frog upon the brink of a pool. She plunges her hands, which are like hayforks, into the barley, turns it over and tastes it. Her toothless jaws munch it, and her cheeks swell out like those of a toad. What a horrible old woman! However, she strikes a bargain with the dealer, and taking out the coins, one by one, she hands them to him as if they were pastilles, as much as to say, "What a lucky man you are to receive so much money." Then she gets up like a wading-bird or a dromedary, and stalks majestically off.

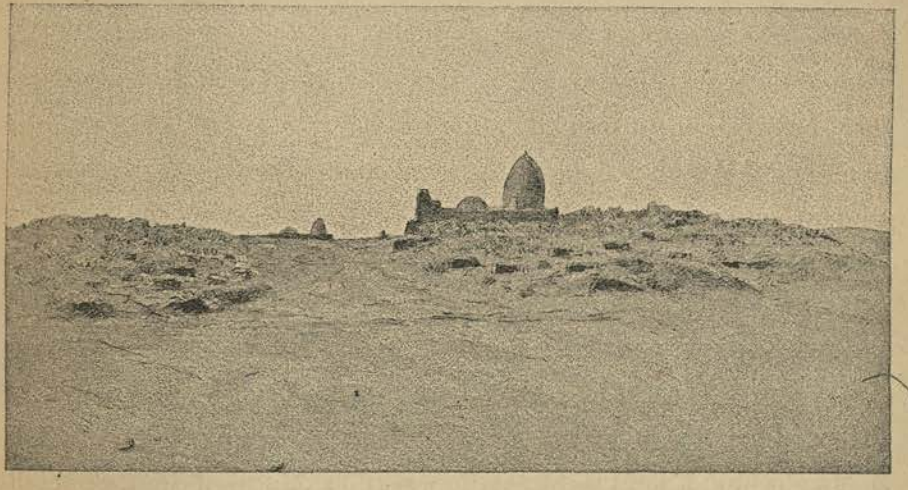
By three o'clock all is astir in the caravansary. Tartars, Arabs, and Persians are getting ready to start at sunset. They groom down the mules, and there is a constant coming and going; the muleteers are singing, the dervishes are bawling, and the itinerant vendors are drawling out the contents of the baskets which they carry on their heads.

The saucepans of the cooks in the open air, near the principal gateway, are steaming, and they fish out of the broth for their customers, principally Arabs, fragments of entrails and other refuse, which they sell for a farthing or so.

Then come the jugglers: men with performing monkeys and snake-charmers, who exhibit the reptiles captured in the neighbouring mountains, and tell their story with great volubility, nearly all of them in a sing-song tone. They are accompanied by a grave-looking mollah, who sells bits of paper which serve as a charm against snake-bites, and even against bullets. While all this is going on a mule comes back from the water-trough, kicking up his heels in the air and putting all the onlookers to flight. Then comes a mulatto who performs feats of agility by keeping a piece of broken glass upon his forehead which he strikes in tune with another piece of glass resting on his thick lips, while behind him is a bandurra player who forms the orchestra. After this the

mulatto makes a boy climb on to his back and ties his feet tightly together, going through a mimic dance, the obscene character of which seems to delight the Persians.

Night sets in, and the caravansary is once more quiet, after the departure of the travellers who have been anxious to avoid the heat of the day. We hear the mules' bells tinkle, the gates open and close, and the pilgrims depart upon their donkeys. Every now and then there is a clatter of mules and fresh travellers entering, and once more silence is re-established, broken now and again by the loud braying of a donkey.



THE CEMETERY OF NICHAPUR.

For more than an hour I hear the mumbling of prayers, which vibrate along the vaulted roof as in a chapel. Are they the prayers of a devout Mussulman or only of some sick man who is endeavouring in this way to vanquish an enervating attack of insomnia?

From Nichapur we go to Chahabad, where we halt near the mouth of a karys, under the arch of which we take a bolt out of the sun. Our horses being tired, we make rather a long stay, and a number of pilgrims pass us. From time to time a cloud of dust, which disappears as it reaches the rivulet, announces the

approach of a band of chattering Arabs. They are always disputing with one another about something, and, not being troubled with any superfluous flesh, they go at a good pace, men, women and children, following their donkeys on foot. They are nearly all very thin, and half naked; but many of them have handsome and regular features.

From Chahabad the eye embraces a well-cultivated country, very green and fertile. The plain extends east and south, while to the north, bare mountains, in the crevices of which patches of snow are still visible, shut in the horizon.

Our stage is a short one, ending at Kadamga, which, with its plane trees and a fine avenue of pines, is a delightful place to stop at, though the crowd of pilgrims, encamped pell-mell in the open, rather detracts from the charm. Kadamga owes its prosperity to a legend scarcely two centuries old. It is the vestibule of Meshed, where the faithful spend a certain time in retreat, so to speak, before entering the holy city.

The legend runs that the Imam Riza enjoined the Shiites not to pass Kadamga without halting there.

When the Imam was on his way to Meshed, he was overcome with fatigue when he reached the site of what is now Kadamga. Seeing a stone handy, he sat down upon it, and this stone being, like many human beings, discontented with its lot, confided its troubles to the holy man as follows:—

"No one is more to be pitied than I am. I receive no shade, the sun scorches me, and does not give the rain from heaven time to cool me. In winter I am frozen, I am alone and deserted. Every one passes me by without vouchsafing me a look."

In short, it confided to the Imam all its troubles, in illustration of the French saying, "Wretched as any stone," and so moved him to compassion that he said—

"Be of good cheer; you will have more honour paid to you

than I have to myself. Two prayers shall be said to you, while only one is offered me."

Having thus spoken, the Imam put his feet upon the stone, which took the imprint of them like wax and has kept it ever since. The Shah Suleiman afterwards had a mosque built for the reception of this stone, and the pilgrims, going to and returning from Meshed, come and rub their faces against it.

We could not do this, for we were infidels.

Upon leaving Kadamga—which, as may be guessed, means the "imprint of the feet,"—our route lay parallel with some low hills, the spurs of which are intersected by the road, and at the foot of which is a well-cultivated plain. To the south extends the grey steppe. We are struck by the large number of towers which stand about in the fields, and we find that they are towers of refuge, built of stones and earth, eighteen or twenty feet high, with small doors at their base. It is here that the natives took refuge, like rabbits at the approach of a fox, when they saw any Turkomans coming. They barricaded themselves in, and remained quiet there till the storm had passed over. I pointed them out to a man from Urmiah, who was travelling with us, and asked him what they were used for.

"For nothing."

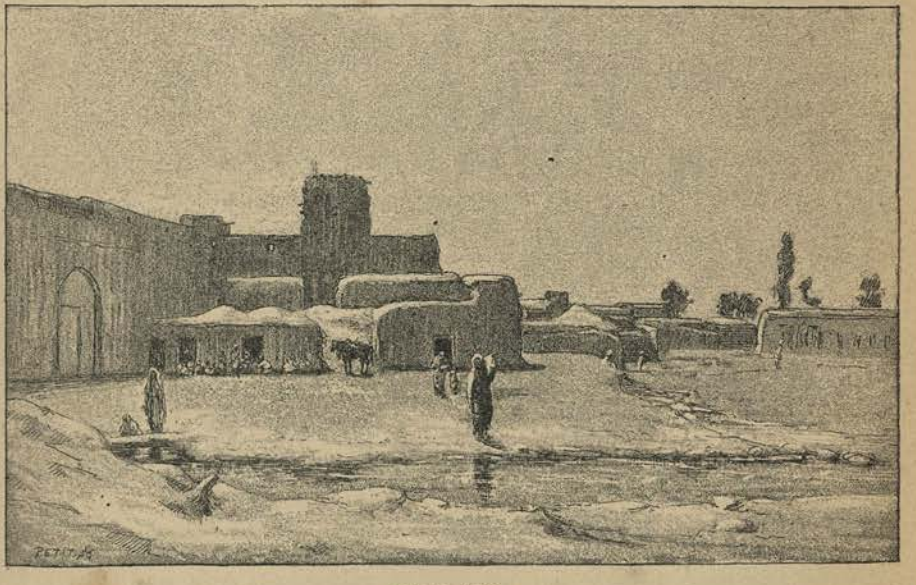
"How do you mean for nothing?"

"Yes, for the last three years; since the Russians have been at Merv. You see that they are being allowed to go to ruin, and that they are not repaired."

As a matter of fact, I can see that one or two have been pulled down to make a dam; a falcon is pluming itself on the piece of wall which remains standing. Peace reigns supreme, and a child, the sole keeper of a flock of sheep, is lying down in the shade. The sense of security is evidently complete.

Having halted at Faker-Daout, we start with the intention of

sleeping at Sherifabad. Plenty of karys and rivulets of excellent water supply the fortified villages which we see to the south of the plain. The heights are covered by turrets, which from a distance resemble the shafts of broken columns. These are the sentry-boxes from which the inhabitants of neighbouring villages mounted guard in turn, scanning the horizon from this vantage ground. As soon as the black helmeted horsemen appeared, mounted upon horses high on the leg like greyhounds, the sentinel



SHERIFABAD.

discharged his gun, and the other turrets repeated the signal. The watchmen rushed down into the plain, with loud shouts; there was a panic in the whole district, every man flying for refuge, one with his sheep and another with his goats; while, if time pressed, the whole of the stock was abandoned, for the Turkomans preferred a brawny Persian to a sheep, as the former would fetch a much better price.

According to our acquaintance from Urmiah, who spoke without the slightest reserve about the cowardice of the Persians, more

than one clean sweep had been made of pilgrims in this region. He said that he should never forget having hidden himself in a karys many years ago when the Turkomans attacked the caravan to which he was attached.

Pointing to a pass in the chain of mountains which rose to the south-east, he said—

"It was from there that they swept down upon us at full gallop, shouting, brandishing their swords over our heads, the blades flashing in the sunlight. Their horses' hoofs made a terrible clatter. All the caravan immediately broke up and fled."

"Were there many of you?"

"About three hundred."

"And how many Turkomans were there?"

"About fifty."

"Why did you not stand upon the defensive? Were you not armed?"

"No one thought of resisting. More than half the caravan was captured, and all the most valuable baggage. When the Turkomans had disappeared, I came out of the karys, where several others had also taken refuge. We gradually collected together again, and when we got back to the waggons, we found the donkeys grazing peaceably, while on the ground were the dead bodies sewn up in skins, which the pilgrims were conveying for burial in holy ground, as well as a number of old men whom the Turkomans had not thought it worth while to carry off."

We leave Sherifabad about seven o'clock, the heat being intense, and we perspire in the company of a great number of pilgrims, who mount the steep paths with the assured hope which we unfortunately do not possess, that the fatigue of their body will be compensated for by something tending to the salvation of the soul. After many ascents and descents we at last reach a sort of platform, from which may be dimly seen, amid the dust below, the

hollow of a deep valley, with a wall of grey mountains in the distance. The holy city is looked for in this direction, but it conceals itself from the gaze like the divinities of Olympus.

The van drivers slacken the pace of their horses. Sadik puts his pipe in his pocket, and sets his kalpak straight on his head; he looks very serious. The mollahs assume an air of additional piety; and the numerous travellers on foot form into a compact group. Suddenly the south-easterly wind tears asunder the veil which has enveloped Meshed, carrying it off in a sudden gust, and the domes of the mosques stand out, glittering like golden helmets; the minarets flank them on either side, like arrows; while beneath them is the mass of small square buildings in which the population dwells, overtopped by wide-branching trees.

Our Tartars stop their vehicles. Abbas, who was in the first one, bends his head in an attitude of deep devotion; Sadik, whip in hand, mumbles a prayer with his usual volubility, mixing up the names of Allah and Ali. His prayer does not take him a minute, and then he blows his nose with his fingers and fills his pipe. Abbas is still bent in prayer, while the young mollahs jump off the van to kneel down. Our man Amman does not get down so quickly as they do, but, like them, he places several stones one upon the top of the other as an ex-voto; but his devotion does not go beyond that, and he leaves the crowd of pilgrims in white turbans, who have gathered behind a seïd in a green turban, to invoke Allah, climbing back again to his waggon. The troop of pilgrims, after having made great demonstrations of piety, begin to move again, following the seïd down the hill, marching with very brisk steps and praying in a loud tone. Some of them apparently are singing—out of joy, no doubt, at being in sight of the holy city; others raise their voices in plaintive accents—sobs of grief accompanying their lamentations, excited probably at the thought of the martyrdom of Ali. His name, repeated a thousand

THE "BEST" OF THE IMAM RIZA AT MESHED.

times over, punctuates this confused but noisy psalmody. Dervishes dance about like men possessed, one of them, who is now all in rags, having been very well dressed when we first saw him at Shahroud.

Despite all this noise, the Osmanli Hadji is asleep on the boxes, and he must be tired out, for no one was so busy as he was during the day in helping the vans out of the ruts, where the road was bad, hanging on to the horses' heads when there was a steep descent, and putting a shoulder to the wheel uphill. We do not go beyond walking pace, the mollahs climbing up to the van again, while on each side are numbers of pilgrims who make quite a din in saying their prayers. Further on, the road becomes very much better, and the horses are put into a gallop, but that does not prevent the fleet-footed dervishes from keeping up with us to beg for alms, entreating the Mussulmans to give them something. But Sadik, just before so contrite, has his kalpak set jauntily on one ear, and while the young mollahs pretend not to see the dervishes, he gives them a piece of his mind and threatens them with his whip, speaking to two of the poor pilgrims, who nearly get run over, in such impolite terms about their mothers that the people perched at the back of our van go into fits of laughter.

We are not long in reaching the walls of Meshed, which from a distance looked rather well, but which, as is so often the case in this world, did not come up to our expectations when we came close to it. The first thing we see are a number of tombs, amid which the road winds, and some of them are open, bones being visible among fragments of shrouds. Cisterns have been sunk in the middle of the cemetery, or more probably interments have taken place around a cistern, and the inhabitants have continued drinking the dirty and putrid water. The faces of the first people we meet are very unhealthy looking, and no wonder, while the passers-by generally do not look well.

We make a considerable detour in order to reach the principal street. When we have passed through the gate, after having satisfied the police of our identity, we traverse the courtyard of the palace occupied by the governor of the Khorassan, and meet a string of prisoners with chains round their neck, among them being several Turkomans, to be recognized by their head-dress. We then come to a filthy and dark bazaar, the shop-keepers in which have a sallow and underhand mien. We all come to the conclusion that we were much better off in the steppe, and how many a time afterwards did we repeat this opinion, first formed on May 26, 1886.

We do not intend to remain long at Meshed. Pepin has not yet recovered from his fall. Capus has only one arm cured, and he cannot bend the other properly, so a few days' rest are indispensable. In the meanwhile we organize our caravan and collect the necessary information for the execution of our scheme, which is to pass into Afghanistan by way of Guriane; to descend to Herat by the country of the Hazares; to examine these peoples; to make some botanical collections; and to reach Merv by the Kuchk.

Unfortunately we have to do with diplomatists, who put every kind of obstacle in our way. In one direction we meet with a point-blank refusal, while in another we are put off with half-and-half promises, which, I fear, are only intended to get rid of us.

We had leave to visit Meshed in detail, but the place has often been described before. All I need say is that Meshed is a holy city, which has been built around the tomb of Imam Riza, the fifth descendant of Ali. From his sepulchre there diverge three main streets, two of which are shaded by fine trees, planted at the side of a ditch filled with dirty and unhealthy water, which runs through the "best." The "best" at Meshed consists of a mass of monuments, built in honour of the Imam Riza, and of shops and

other establishments required for the sustenance of the pilgrims, mollahs, refugees, and other people living within the enclosure. No one has the right to enter unless he is a Shiite—an arrangement which is very convenient for Shiite debtors, and very inconvenient for Sunnite or European creditors. The finest mosque in Meshed was built by Gohar-Shah, a descendant of Timour, and not by a Persian prince.

The houses are built of mud, and are generally below the level of the street. A great part of the town belongs to the keepers of the sepulchre, the chief of whom is the most important personage in the town. The pilgrimage is a pretext for trade, as in the West during the Middle Ages, and the holy city is also a great commercial depôt. There are a great number of Russian Tartars, and they sell a great many goods from their own country, which come by way of the Caspian and Asterabad. The population of Meshed has not a very high character for morality, and did not strike us as being very favourably disposed towards infidels, though one cannot look for much tolerance in cities of this kind.

LEAVING MESHED.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM MESHED TO SAMARCAND.

Departure from Meshed—The Kchef—Vakouf and Shiite fanaticism—The scenery more and more like Central Asia—A dream at Muzderane—The desert—Daybreak—The heat—Persian Sarakhs—Russian Sarakhs—A modern Cecrops—We engage Menas—Night stages in the desert—Nothing to drink—The oasis—Merv—Meeting of two peoples—A nascent town—Still the desert—The railway—What is thought of the Turkomans—The Russians—At Samarcand for the sixth time—Projects.

We hired mules yesterday, and engaged as an attendant, in addition to Amman, one of our late travelling companions, a native of Urmiah, all being now ready for a start. By daybreak we are all prepared, but our muleteers do not turn up, so we have to put it off till the next day.

At last we got off, the mules, well loaded, being under the charge of the men of Koum, who thoroughly understand their business. Pepin is carried in a litter in order that he may have time to get perfectly strong. When he gets to Merv, he will ride,

or at Sarakhs if he feels well enough. Capus and I amble along upon animals which we bought at Meshed. With what pleasure we march out of the holy city! When we get on to the caravan road and look back, the golden domes again glitter in the sunlight, and this dirty city has once more assumed its imposing aspect in the distance. We see it, of course, from the east, inasmuch as we are travelling in that direction. The dust is very deep, and we have to swallow a certain quantity of it, thanks to a troop of gipsies, who, mounted upon fine horses, are driving a number of mules, donkeys, and goats, before them. They have bright, burnished arms, but their clothes are extraordinarily dirty, while their wives, old before their time, very ugly and impudent, march along at a rapid pace, chattering in shrill tones all the time. The rear is brought up by a rather pretty girl, decently clad, and she smiles graciously to a hideous Tartar, who is paying her compliments.

The plain is cultivated, especially in the lower parts to the north-east; all the villages are fortified, and they belong, as we are told, to the guardians of the sepulchre in Meshed.

The cultivated tract ends, and we are again in the steppe when the road diverts from the Kchef, the ancient beds of which are almost the only bits of cultivation. Our stage is a short one, as first stages always are, and we halt at Karabuga, a vakouf.

Before reaching this village, our attention is attracted by a village in ruins, which is round in shape, like a dovecot, built of brick, and completely abandoned. In a niche there are some leaves of an old book, while a few butterflies are fluttering around an owl perched upon the end of a cornice, which one would imagine to be stuffed if his eyes did not blink now and then. The owner of the place appears to be a ventriloquist, who excites the public curiosity by his way of snoring from the inside of the underground cell which he has had made, and in which he leads the life of an anchorite.

Karabuga is a vakouf of the Imam Riza, as we soon find out, for Amman is expelled from the village, inside the gates of which he had penetrated. He tells us that he was loaded with insults when he asked if we could have a lodging; and reproached for taking service with infidels, which is regarded as an act of infamy all round Meshed. While he is explaining all this to us, a number of men swarm out of the fortress, like wasps which have been disturbed come out of their nest; and then a stream of people began to bear down upon us, howling, gesticulating, brandishing cudgels and making for Amman, who at once put a cartridge into

ALTERCATION AT KARABUGA.

his rifle. This precaution appeared to have its effect upon the vanguard, for there was a brief halt, and this gave time for an enormous young man, bare to the waist, to push his way to the front. Amman brought his rifle to bear on this man, who was armed with an enormous club, and whose face was convulsed with the fury characteristic of the raging madman. But he had not lost his head entirely, for he first hesitated and then drew back to the edge of a ditch in his rear. Amman pushed him into it with the muzzle of his rifle, and the man, though less furious in his gestures, began to howl louder than before. As the crowd continued to show great excitement and to proffer threats and insults,

we come forward in order to rescue Amman and to distribute a volley of blows with our whips among the crowd. The women, who are behind, squall and dance about more than the men. Our intervention brings about that of the mollahs of Karabuga, who come forward in their white turbans and pronounce words of peace. The populace disperses, but not without a great many shouts and gestures of defiance. The scene is a very remarkable one, and it is witnessed by a great many spectators grouped upon the walls above.

We encamp near the river, the water of which is not perceptibly salt, despite the saline efflorescences on the bank. We are close to the path by which the men and women come down to the river to fetch water, and we are masters of the situation, as this will enable us to obtain from these fanatics the indispensable provisions which they might otherwise refuse us. What a fuss they make over a few pints of milk, which we only obtain after half an hour's negotiation, and finally by using threats. And when Amman hands to the vendor the few coins representing the value of the milk, the latter says—

"Put them on the ground."

"Why?"

"Because I cannot touch the money which has been sullied by the hand of an unclean man. And you are impure, for you serve the infidels."

Thereupon the Persian put his foot on the coins and rubbed them in the dust in order to remove their impurity; after which he picked them up. The same scene was enacted every time we made a purchase. All this valley of the Kchef appears fertile, and quite capable of feeding Meshed, as, in fact, it does.

After leaving Karabuga, the road follows the Kchef, and upon reaching the point where the river has not room to spread itself out, and has just managed to find its way between steep banks,

there is a sudden cessation of cultivation. To the right and left of that portion which can easily be irrigated extends the barren steppe, and to fertilize the soil, which is very much above the level of the water, would demand an amount of industry which is not to be expected of people who have no great or pressing needs.

Upon the left bank, to the north-east, are fortified villages, with watch-towers on the summits. Capus and myself, having lost our way, meet some Tamuri men who are pasturing a large flock of goats and sheep, with a great number of horses. They speak Persian, and live beneath shelters consisting of pieces of felt placed upon stakes driven into the ground. Upon returning westward towards the Kchef, which we ought not to have quitted, we meet several more of these Tamuri, and their dogs fly at our horses and bite them in the hind legs. We reprimand their owners, who only call them off when they see us beginning to beat them. The excuse which one of them makes is a very good one—

"Why should he not bite you? He is a dog."

Evidently, in his opinion, dogs were made to bite.

We reach the village of Keïchidar very thirsty, after nine hours on horseback. Our baggage has not arrived. We see a number of idlers collected under the porch, and after having duly saluted them, we ask for some skim milk, which we offer to pay for. They tell us that we shall have it at once, but after waiting a quarter of an hour, we see no signs of it. We ask again, and are assured that "it is coming;" but as, after waiting another ten minutes, we do not get any, I take out my watch and explain to the three principal men in the band that unless we have the milk in less time than it takes to walk round the fortress they will be punished. They at once give orders to that effect, and there is a stir like that of an ant-heap upon which one has trodden, the women shouting, the children swarming upon the

housetops. But the time appointed has lapsed, so the three men whom we had picked out are flogged, and they at once bring us such large bowls of milk that Capus and myself cannot empty them, though our carriers who came up just at this moment, are not long in doing so for us. We encamp in a field near the village, and as our baggage no doubt raises us in the esteem of the inhabitants, we are beset by the very same men who would just before have left us to die of thirst, while the one who got the worst beating comes to beg for presents and for medical remedies, endeavouring to secure our sympathies.

A BUTCHER AT KEÏCHIDAR.

At Keïchidar, we pass the night under too abundant a dew to please us, for we sleep in the open air, leaving on the 11th of June for Muzderane. At first we follow the Kchef, and we are at once struck by the similarity of aspect between this valley and that of Tchotkal, which we had visited five years previously, to the east of Tashkend and to the north of the Ferghana. We feel that we are in Central Asia. We see the same terraces at the foot of the hills streaked with sandy granite, the same schistose soil crumbling away and peeling off in thin layers. Near the water's edge are bushy rose-trees, while in the centre of the

stream are islands with an abundance of thickets, willows, poplars, and larches. There can be no doubt about this being the Arabo-Caspian plain. There is geographical unity, but not that of the people. The physiognomy of the ground and its nature do not suffice to make up all these aggregates. A greater force of agglutination is required; and, moreover, these great deserts do not form a bond of union between agglomerations of men.

We cross the Kchef near an abandoned fortress. It is quite in ruins, and is no longer inhabited by warriors, but by pigeons and partridges, which fly out of it at our approach. Having followed for some distance the left bank of the Kchef, we bend to the north, being still in the steppe, which is bounded by denuded hills. We meet Turkomans, on their way to Meshed, driving horses before them instead of Persians, as upon a previous occasion. Suddenly we come in sight of green slopes, trees, and a ruined castle; and this is Muzderane, which is romantically situated close to a fountain of excellent water. We sit down beneath a willow-tree, and the mules enjoy the grass, while we appreciate a cup of tea made with water which has not the salt taste so noticeable since we left Meshed. A heavy storm of thunder and lightning then comes on, accompanied by torrents of rain, which swells our stream to a torrent in a trice and inundates us in no time. But the sun soon shines out again, and the wind drives the clouds over the mountains. I go up to the castle, which was formerly closed by a thick door. This has now disappeared, and nothing is left standing but the walls. The fortress seems to me to have always been short of water. It is commanded from the east, and must always have been easy to capture.

It is built upon a promontory surrounded by ravines, except to the east, where a narrow pathway winds between the stones. From the top of the ramparts the view is, after the heavy storm has left pools of water which glitter in the light, a very grand one.

It seems as if a sea had been transformed into an undulating desert, and had left pools of water in the depressions of the ground. The horizon is bounded on all sides by lofty mountains. There is no sign of life, though to the west a line of thick mist just above the level of the soil, like the breath of an invisible being lying outstretched, is faintly perceptible. This is the moisture rising from the Kchef.

On descending from the fortress, I feel a sensation of expanding and of softening, as a tow-line does when exposed to the sun.

ENCAMPMENT AT MUZDERANE.

Everything here seems so pleasant. Under my feet there is abundance of grass for the animals, and the perspective of sour milk; the water is fresh, not salt; the fortress is falling into ruin, so that there is no fear of war, and life seems worth living. I hum a tune as I approach the camp, my head full of these benevolent fancies, and my eyes looking into vacancy.

I am called back to the realities of life by the imprecations of one of our muleteers, who has suddenly gone off his head, and has been biting a recalcitrant mule by the nose.

We had a very heavy dew to-night, and we were not sorry to

warm ourselves by a good walk. So we started at daybreak, and, after climbing the stony road leading to the pass of Muzderane and casting a last look at its wild scenery, descend towards the valley of the Tedjene. We are still in a desert intersected by hills, upon the highest of which herds of antelopes and gazelles keep watch. At sight of us, they give the alarm, and the whole troop of them trot off along the summits. Sometimes we come upon them feeding in the valley, at a turn in the road, and it is curious to see them bound off, disappearing in an instant. The route is a monotonous one, with hills or crumbling rocks on each side. Whole blocks have rolled down from the summit; the crests are jagged, and embankments have been formed by the continual crumbling away of the soil. After a long march in the sun, we halt at the foot of some rocks half-way down. Further below us runs a river, which is almost lost amid the quantity of rose-trees on its bank, in the branches of which thousands of birds are chattering. The water is salt, but about an hour further on we come to a tiny stream, the water of which is very passable, so we fill our leathern bottles and flagons, water our mules and horses and drink a good stoop ourselves, lying flat on our stomachs, with the water laving our noses.

We were very thirsty, not having found a bit of shade except that of the blocks of rock or the surface of the horses' bodies. We shall send to fetch some more of this water at night, and our men will not grumble at the job.

Three Turkomans then come and encamp near us, and they are on their way to sell leather at Merv. For merchants, they are very poorly clad, wearing a shirt and cotton drawers and a frieze cloak full of holes. I had forgotten the tall head-gear, and the coarse heavy boots with no heels. They water their horses, and eat their evening meal, taking the precaution first to make their horses sweat by galloping them for a short time. Their

meal is extremely frugal, consisting solely of inferior tea, which they sip out of a cup, each man taking the cup by turns. Seeing me look at them, they ask me to join their banquet; so I taste the tea, which is made of half putrid water which has been shaken about in a new leathern bottle which has not lost the taste of grease. The Turkomans have stomachs like dromedaries, and can digest anything.

By the time they have finished their tea it is seven o'clock, when they stretch themselves out to sleep on the ground, so as to be ready for a start at ten. They reckon upon travelling all night, and arriving at Sarakhs at three o'clock—that is, just when the sun is hottest. They will do all this long stage without eating; and their last meal, consisting of bread and rice, was partaken of at Muzderane at eight in the morning. They show us their empty wallets, so there can be no mistake about it. We give them a little rice and some scraps of meat, which they seem thoroughly to enjoy.

Is it not wonderful to find men going nearly thirty hours without food? and what fine soldiers they would make! It is true that we are in the middle of summer, which to a certain extent accounts for their sobriety.

We start in the morning, following the stream beside which we had encamped. The damp banks bear the footprints of some feline animal like a panther, which has been attracted, no doubt, by the antelopes and gazelles. Our stage comes to an end when the river has ceased to be anything more than a pool of stagnant and muddy water; and as it is the last we shall encounter before reaching the Tedjene, we take advantage of the circumstance to let our horses graze and to water them while the heat is still intense. The plain is not far off, and the steppe or desert will extend all the way to Bokhara, beyond the Oxus, "like a true carpet of gratitude," to use the favourite Persian phrase.

We pass the afternoon under the shade of a tent improvised with our wraps, and the thermometer marks, about two o'clock, 95° F. in the shade, but there is a refreshing wind blowing from the north.

Before nightfall, we resume our journey. The herds of gazelles are numerous, and some of them, comprising several hundred head, stop a long way off, look at us, and then gallop off over the hills, raising a cloud of dust in their flight, more rapid than that of the wind. Then the night sets in very dark, and

AN ENCAMPMENT.

we advance silently in the steppe, no other sound being audible save that of the crickets. Every now and again a shadow flits by, with a sound of branches brushed aside. This is a gazelle which we have startled from its sleep, and which crushes the tamaris under its feet as it jumps up. After midnight we stretch ourselves out for a short time on the soil, but we soon jump up with a start, fearing that we have overslept ourselves, and on we go again. At last the pale dawn glides from beneath the sable hangings of the night, and gradually rolls them up before us.

The plants on the steppe stand out like trees, then the horizon lights up, the sky is tinged with silver, and we revel in the pure light of the first hour of the day, announcing the coming of the sun, which suddenly shines out and effaces the deep obscurity above more rapidly than fire consumes the thinnest gauze.

Things around us gradually recover their true proportions, and as we proceed, we see cultivated land, straw huts, water in the ditches, with men, women, and children moving about around their dwellings. Near the Tedjene are a number of ruined towers; they are all about the same distance apart, and they were at one time connected with the square fortress, with gaping walls, from which emerges a white house, above which floats proudly the Persian flag. We go through the fortress under the shadow of the hovels clinging to it. A few soldiers are sitting about, and they present anything but a brilliant appearance; some of them are cutting up a sheep, another is digging, while another is coming in with a handful of grass. At the exit gate a sentinel is whiling away the time, out of the sun, behind the shade of the large gate made of thick planks. The other men on duty are asleep, in their shirt sleeves, under the porch.

Upon the banks of the Tedjene we await the arrival of our baggage, which is some way behind us. The waters of the stream are turbulent and muddy, with a very rapid current. There is an island in the middle of the stream, and on the opposite bank we can see men in white blouses, who do not look any bigger than children. The baggage is transferred to camels, on account of the depth of the water. As it will take some time to get it all off, I start upon a reconnoitring expedition, and I notice on the Russian side the straw roofs of the hospital. Close to the bank, further up the stream, to the south, are the tents of the Cossacks, with their horses picketed close to the river. A soldier tells me that the *gorod* (town) of Sarakhs is at the

extremity of a dusty road going east. I follow this road, thinking, as I go, of the route we have just travelled over, of Persia, so devoid of unity, with her deserts and oases, and her population devoid of all national spirit; and I cannot help reflecting that the Russians, whose empire begins again here, close to Herat, must have said to themselves, after visiting this country, that it was like a body without any soul, with neither the resolution nor the power to offer any resistance to any one, and that it was at the mercy of the first who chose to strike a decided blow.

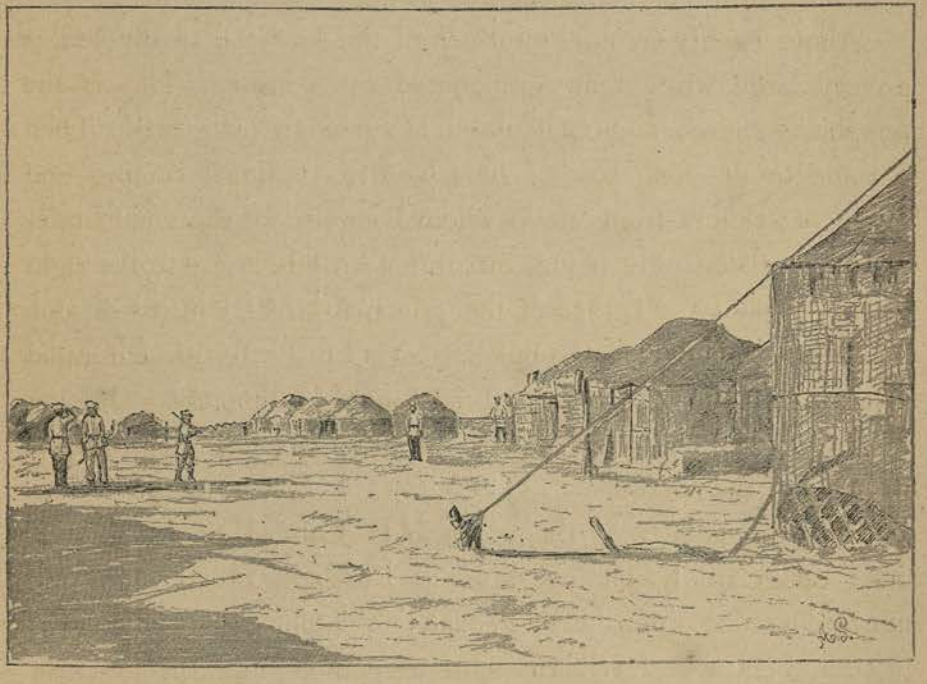
About twenty minutes' walk from the hospital, to my left, is a very large white tent, surmounted by a cross. This is the temporary church, and outside stands a soldier on guard. Then I come to the long row of huts, with a continual coming and going of soldiers, from one of whom I inquire for the commander of the garrison. He points out to me a white house to the right of the road, at the corner of the principal street, which will soon be lined with houses if the building goes on at the present rapid rate. Turkomans are making bricks, pounding mortar, and doing masonry work, in company with the Russian workmen, despite the heat of the sun.

The commander of the garrison is Colonel Salza, who at once offers us hospitality with a Russian cordiality all the more charming after the Persian obsequiousness or fencing, just as sweet water is all the more acceptable after the brackish water of the pools in the steppe. It is arranged that we shall make a brief halt at Sarakhs, and that to-morrow, after visiting an interesting mosque on the right bank, we shall start for Merv.

The new town consists, at present, of two parallel streets, the principal of which is named after its founder, Baron Salza, with whom we have a very pleasant breakfast. While in Turkestan, we have more than once found ourselves at table with the founders of cities, and we have never had any reason to complain of these

modern Cecrops. We had got it into our heads somehow that the man who taught the Athenians how to cultivate the olive, after having bestowed a city upon them, was a rather disagreeable sort of person, and concluding from the particular to the general, we were inclined to take the same view of his imitators. This is what often happens to people who pore over books, and it is one of the reasons why travel does one good.

At the end of this first main street, near the soldiers' huts, are



SARAKHS.

a number of shops below ground, half cellar half hut, which seem to command plenty of custom. The articles sold there are those which soldiers require for repairing their uniforms and keeping them in order, as well as "vodka" and wine from the Caucasus. The second street, which is newer and narrower, is inhabited principally by Armenians and officers. Here the shops are numerous, but small, and among their contents are pyramids of tinned meats

and sardine boxes, together with bottles of very curious shapes, representing wild beasts, etc., and filled with liqueurs of various strange kinds. There are no milliners' shops, but then there are so few women. There are a few tailors sewing, by the aid of machines in the doorway of their shanties. Thus it will be seen that in newly founded towns, the first of things to be sold are articles of food, drink, and clothing, and those which follow immediately after are not articles of common use. When once he has procured what is indispensable, man hankers after what will amuse him as a rule, and this is easy to be obtained in most cases.

From Sarakhs, we send a telegram to Askhabad to inform General Kamaroff of our arrival and present our compliments to him. While awaiting the reply, which will be equivalent to permission to continue our journey, we go to see a mausoleum which is said to be that of Cain, upon the right bank of the Tedjene. It is a monument presenting very few features of interest, and it is in a very dilapitated condition. We spend the whole day (the 13th) at Sarakhs, and have an opportunity of seeing the troops at our leisure. They are a fine set of men, the battalion of our host being particularly good. If they are as good at bottom as their external appearance would lead one to suppose, they would be capable of achieving great things under the command of such officers as Baron Salza.

We engage a Turkoman who is to carry upon a camel two barrels which the major of the hospital has lent us for storing our water. We at the same time engage a man named Menas at the suggestion of our host; and Menas, though an Armenian, cares more for adventure than for commerce, and does not set much store by money, spending it as fast as he earns it. He comes with us, without quite knowing where he is going, and promises to follow us to the last. It seems that he has taken

a fancy to us, for he makes up his mind at noon, at one o'clock he sells his shop to a friend, and hands the deed of sale to the baron, asking him to receive the money for him and give it to him upon his return. An hour later, he comes to us with his big Turkoman horse and at once begins to assist in the preparations for a start. Amman is to remain behind and go to Askhabad; we do not keep him because he does not suit us. The man from Urmiah, who is a pretty good cook, but desperately lazy, will accompany us as far as Merv.

Upon the evening of June 16th we start for Rukhabad, the old Turkoman Sarakhs, where we are to get a supply of water from the Tedjene, as there is none to be had between there and Merv, a distance of eighty-five miles, and the heat is very great. At Sarakhs, the thermometer had been as much as 123° F, in the shade, and to-day it is 115° F. It is easy to imagine how parched with thirst the most temperate of men must feel in such heat as this. In addition to the two barrels, we fill a number of leathern bottles and several gourds covered with felt which are suspended to the saddle.

The chief of the town who has received us with the greatest possible affability, joins Baron Salza and accompanies us a little way. Before parting, we halt in the steppe and drink, to our own health and that of our respective countries, a few bottles of wine which the colonel's cossacks produce from their knapsacks. While we are drinking these toasts, a horseman, whose figure looms very large in the mist, comes up at a trot. It is the aged pope (or priest) of the battalion, who is returning from his usual evening ride, being in the habit of taking a ten or twelve mile ride before going to bed. He says that it is good both for his horse and himself.

Upon the colonel asking him to drink to the health of the Frenchman, he says: "The French and myself are very old

acquaintances. I saw some of them in the Crimea, and very good fellows they are."

The old priest carries his three score years and ten right gallantly. His tall figure is not the least bent, though for the last forty years he has seen many a battlefield. He wishes us a pleasant journey and a safe return, and so we mount our horses and, with many a God speed exchanged, ride off in the darkness.

At Rukhabad, we halt near the stream. The Russians had originally made it their head-quarters, but the water is so bad that they lost a great many soldiers. They accordingly moved their camp and town to its present site.

Yesterday we lost our cook, and he was only brought back to us at ten o'clock this morning. We shall not start till sunset, as it is impossible to travel during the heat of the day, the thermometer standing at 115° F. about two o'clock.

After a final cup of tea, we start about six p.m. The wind is blowing from the N.W., the north wind coming from the chain of the Kopet-Dagh. What thirsty work it is, even now that the sun has gone down, and to make matters worse, the wind brings to us—half asleep as we are—the murmur as of a waterfall. We dream of fresh springs, and upon opening our eyes find ourselves in the most arid of deserts. Rodents of various kinds dart across the road like so many balls, and the crickets keep up their constant cry, never seeming to get hoarse, though they have nothing to drink.

At one o'clock we are obliged to halt. Men and horses stretch themselves out on the sand, being alike eager to sleep. The water in the gourds is boiled, and then the tea is got ready. Menas and Pepin, who have not yet laid down, cannot drink it, and I am the only one who does not throw up the cup he has taken, but I cannot manage a second. I hear some one calling, and about two hundred yards back I find our Turkoman standing

beside his camel and the two barrels of water. One of the ropes has broken, and the whole load has fallen to the ground. I hail Menas, and the three of us manage, with great difficulty, to lift up the two barrels, each of which holds nearly seventy gallons of water. To-morrow, we shall not find a drop anywhere. The Turkoman tells us our muleteers would not lend him any assistance, and he indignantly denounces "those dogs of Persians." At four o'clock we make a fresh start, and again we see the field mice and other rodents, hear the joyful notes of the cricket, and feel the scorching wind. When the sun rises, the rodents disappear and the crickets are silent, while the larks greet the dawn with a hymn shorter than usual, being displeased with the sun which burns like a furnace as soon as it has got above the horizon. About nine o'clock, we reach the smooth surface of a takir, which would make a splendid course for velocipede races. A mirage bars the way, and we fancy that we can see a numerous caravan moving along. It is in reality our muleteers unloading the baggage. It is just nine o'clock, and the wind has gone down as the sun rises higher.

We eat, and drink, and sleep till five p.m. under the shade of our baggage. At two o'clock the thermometer stood at 104° F., at six o'clock only at 95° F. So, feeling comparatively cool, we made an immediate start. We had been encamped near the ruins of Kus-Khan, which consists of the remains of a cistern, with a cupola, which has fallen in.

It was amusing to see the muleteers, who had refused to help the Turkoman load the barrels, crying *peccavi* and entreating us to give them water, which we could not refuse to do, for though they did not deserve any, their mules would have been the sufferers. At eleven p.m. we meet a flock of sheep, and get a drink of milk. Then we meet some horsemen, who hail us in French. They are headed by Lieutenant Dennissoff, who stops and drinks tea with us, and talks to us about Teheran and Paris, where we find that

we have mutual acquaintances. We are treated to some excellent water, and part company at midnight, the lieutenant kindly offering us the use of his lodgings at Merv, where he tells us that we shall not find many. He tells us that at Tachrabad we shall find that the waters of the Murgab have overflown the road.

About seven a.m. flocks of ducks, pigeons, eagles, falcons, and partridges pass over our heads, and we see them alight in the

TURKOMAN AND HIS DONKEY.

low ground, where the water is, and we soon come to the ruins of a caravansary near a pond covered with waterfowl, which were drinking and washing themselves. We encamp upon the bank of the *aryk* (canal) through which the water comes into this pond, and having had a copious breakfast, we drink and then bathe. The wind blows from the north-east, the birds disappear, the dust rises in clouds, and the sand strikes us full in the face. This lasts till five p.m., and the thermometer, in the shade and exposed to the wind, stood at 105° F. about midday, and never fell below

100° F. We sleep with our heads under our cloaks, but still, thanks to the excellent water, the day passes tolerably well.

About six we start for Merv, and at one a.m. we hear the dogs of the aouls barking. The air is laden with fever, and we are upon the edge of the oasis in the marshes formed by the inundation of the Murgab. We fill our kumgane with an evil-smelling water; we light a fire with pieces of wood taken from a partially demolished bridge, and take a brief rest, our horses browsing on next to nothing. We wait the break of day before resuming our journey, as we have been marching by guess-work since Tachrabad, Menas not being able to remember the direction.

At daybreak we can see a great many tents and plenty of water. The oasis is well cultivated. The tents are erected in rows upon the embankments raised above the canals. The inhabitants wake up, and all of them—men, women, and children—bathe, as do the cattle and horses. We see a great number of them bent in prayer as we go along the dusty road. The sun is again very fierce, and the air is heavy and moist. We pass a great many arbas, camels loaded with bricks and forage; while, upon approaching the town, we see Turkomans busy brickmaking. The men are tall, bony, and thin; they have a large straight nose, thick lips, small eyes, the proud and leisurely carriage of warriors, of men who do not regard work as an honourable thing. They do not walk with a quick nervous tread, like labourers going out to their day's work. We enter the city, which was concealed from our view by a belt of trees. It is enveloped in dust, and almost burnt up by the sun, and nothing but the smell of sulphur is wanting to make one fancy that one is close to the mouth of a solfatare.

In this burning whirlwind one encounters an activity which is quite bewildering when one has just emerged from the absolute

solitude of the desert. One hears shouts and calls, orders being given, and disputes of every kind, while all around waggons are being loaded and unloaded, and building is going on; Russian masons, with their long hair, having as helpmates Turkomans in linen drawers, or Tartars with their hair flattened over the temples. In one place a zinc roof is being put up, in another foundations are being dug out, and the men who are digging have a layer of mud, diversified by streaks of sweat, upon their almost naked bodies. There is quite a din of carpenters' hammers and pick-axes, and building materials are being conveyed in all directions. We pass a number of Turkomans, with sandals on their feet and the *pil* (shovel) over their shoulder, while others are riding a donkey or a horse, with the shovel thrust into their waistbelt like a sword. These were men employed upon the railway. We recognize Cossacks, Persians, Armenians, natives of Bokhara, and well-dressed Jews with corkscrew ringlets down their cheeks and fur-trimmed caps on their heads. Wherever we go we see people drinking out of flagons or gourds, and everybody is in a sweat. We are brought to a momentary stop by a block of vehicles, a fact which seems very strange after so many miles travel in the open. When one reflects that there were not, a dozen years ago, ten tents on this spot, it is clear how great has been the inroad of one people upon another. It seems as if there was a determination to have a town built in spite of all obstacles and without a moment's delay.

Two streets have been finished, and our lodgings are in one of them, the servant of Lieutenant Dennissoff taking us in directly he sees his master's letter; for, though he cannot read, he recognizes the hand, and that is enough for him.

These two streets run from east to west, starting from the Murgab, the inundations of which have already demolished all the houses built close to the left bank. The houses have only one

A THIRSTY GROUP.

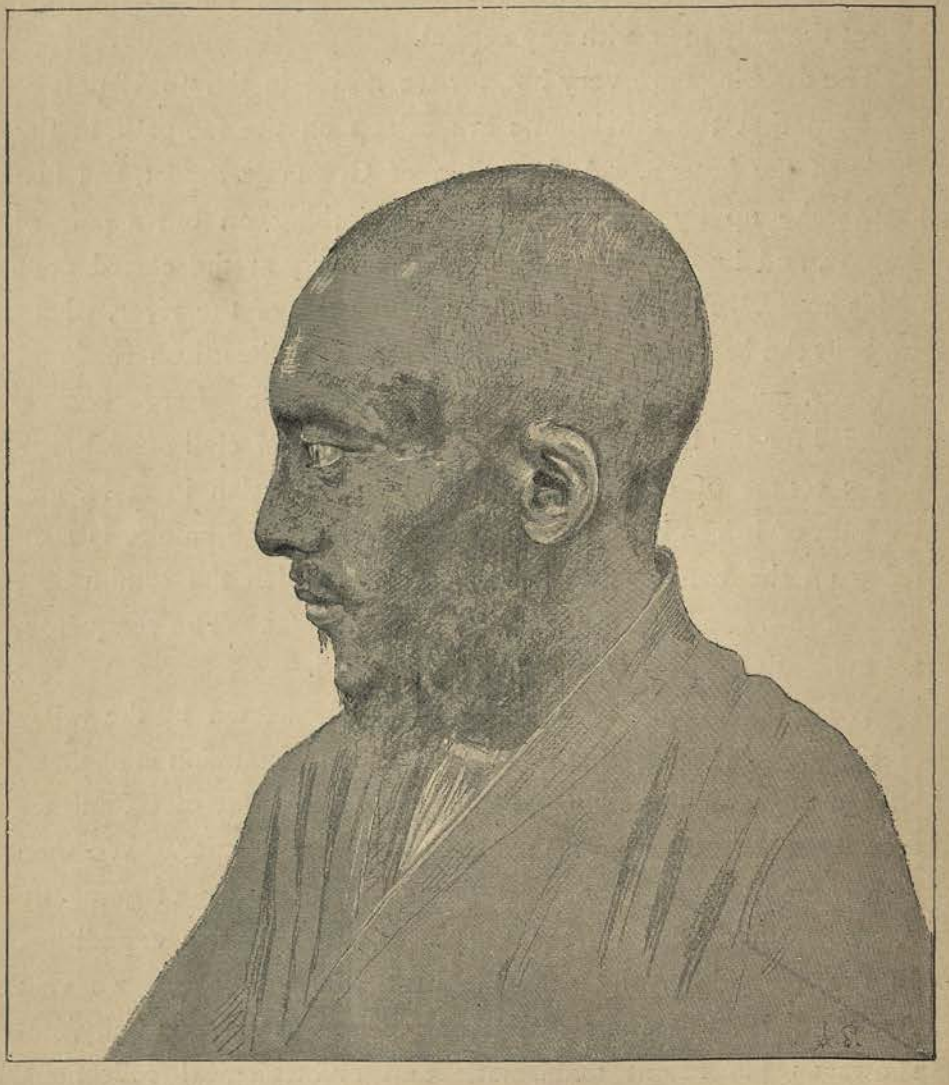
story, with flat roofs, built of clay, and bricks from the old town of Merv. They nearly all belong to Jews, who alone of the natives accepted without hesitation the Russian dominion, and set themselves to build without delay. They were, moreover, almost the only men with any capital.

The dwellings are very hot, for we notice in the "old" part of the town that the inhabitants are asleep on the footpath, in the shade of the houses. A fat tailor, of Germanic aspect, has just been woke up by the sun. He has nothing on but a pair of drawers, and knocks with quite comical hurry at the closed door of his house. A ferry leads to the right bank of the river, where are built the barracks, and the church, with its sheet-iron roof and its tower, much broader at the base than summit. Large houses, intended for the heads of the army and the chief civil officials, are in the course of construction. They are Russian in style, and are built of bricks baked in the kilns, of which the smoke is seen rising on the banks of the Murgab, upon which the combustible used—brushwood and reeds—is floated on rafts. The conquerors are evidently settling themselves in for good.

We think of making our way into Afghanistan by the valley of Kuchk. Hearing that a Russian scientific mission is about to start in the same direction, we let it go on in front of us, and we soon learn that it has been unable to pass the frontier. We then endeavour to obtain information as to the possibility of going by Andkhoi direct, but we are unable to organize this expedition. In the meanwhile, and with the heat still very great, we visit Askhabad, where General Kamaroff receives us very cordially, and shows us his recent numismatic and archæological collections, which we should much like to see in our museums.

We saw the Russians at work upon their railway, under the energetic superintendence of the indefatigable General Annenkoff, aided by engineers, among whom we find a compatriot in M.

Lebrun. All my readers know by the newspapers how rapidly this railway was made, and, after seeing the Russians at work, we were surprised at their great endurance. Upon the 14th of July,

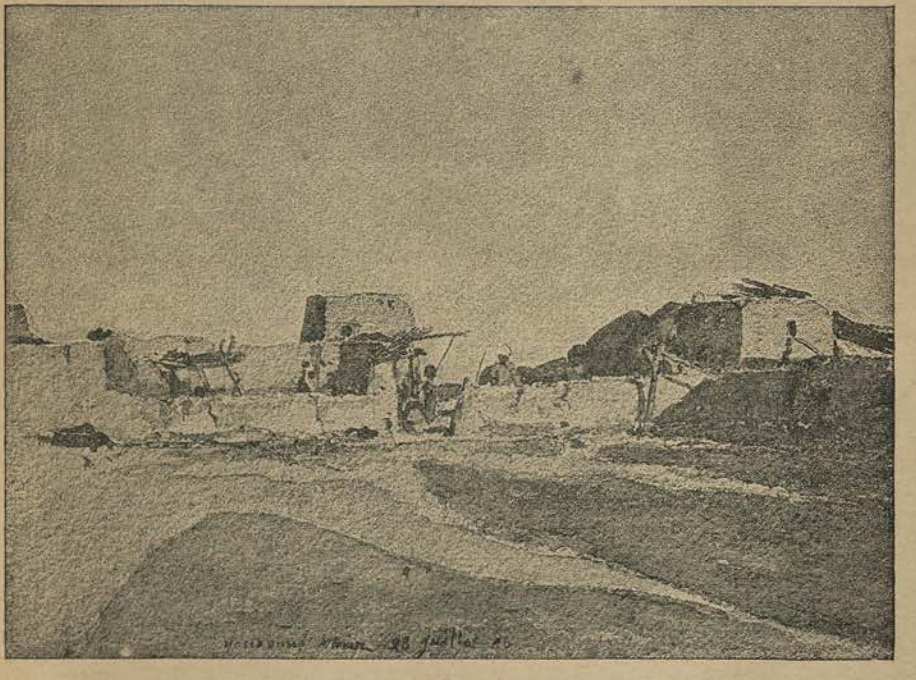


TEKKE TURKOMAN KHAN.

the first train entered Merv station. The town had increased wonderfully in a month, and a music-hall was already opened. The inauguration of the railway was celebrated by banquets and

A SARTHIAN REAPER.

horse races, and all the Turkoman tribes had sent representatives to take part in the rejoicings to which Alikhanoff had invited them. He had first of all called upon them to submit to him, and now he was acting as their administrator and riding at the head of their troops. We joined in the rejoicings, and drank to the continuation of the enterprise at the same table as our friends of the previous day.

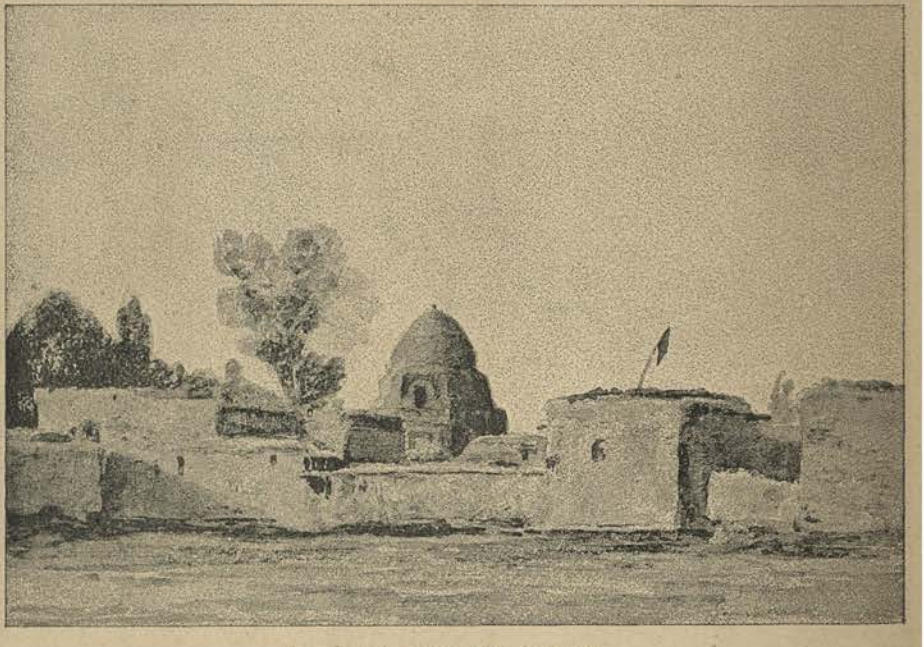


YUSUF KHAN.

We will not attempt to give their names, as we might omit some, and that would seem invidious. All we can say is, that we received universal kindness at Merv, which we left on the evening of July 22nd, after visiting the ruins of the ancient Mervs.

When these lines see the print, the railway will be open to Samarcand, by way of Tchardjui and Bokhara. We went on horseback, carrying our baggage on camels, in the heat of summer. The journey was a most trying one, for we were obliged to travel

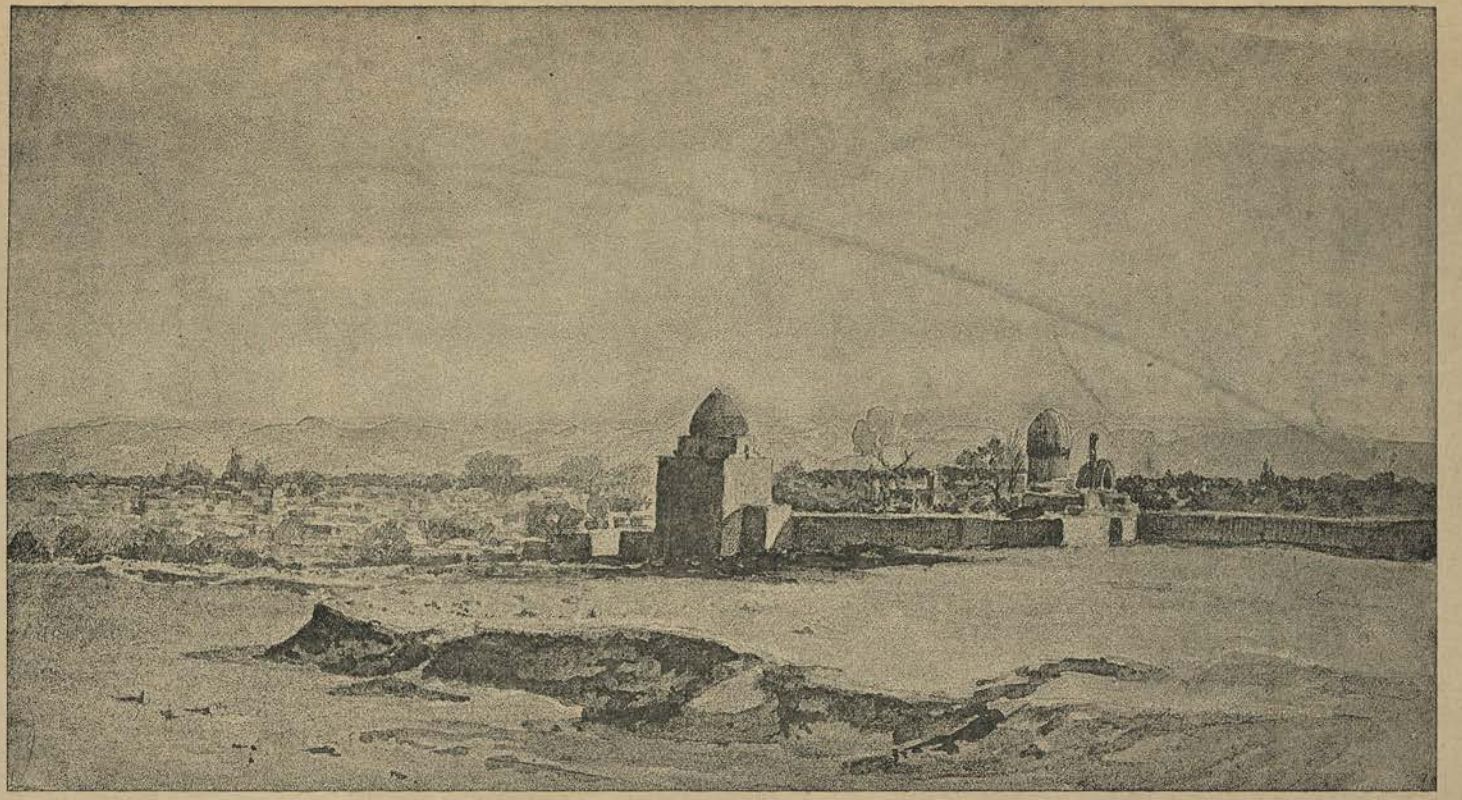
part of the day and all night. It was only when within a day's march of Tchardjui that we found any water fit to drink, at a place called Repetek. Upon the 25th of July, the thermometer reached nearly 115° F. in the shade, and the whole time we were scorched by a burning wind from the north. Several natives had died of thirst in this district, and work had to be suspended. In the night of July 26th, we lost ourselves in the sands, despite our



HOUSE AND TOMB AT SAMARCAND.

Turkoman guides, who were very well qualified for this work. It is almost impossible to form an idea of the difficulty of crossing a desert like this in the month of July, and no one can tell better than we how invaluable the new railway will be. Upon the night of August 13th, we reached Samarcand, after a halt at Tchardjui and another at Bokhara.

I need not describe the route from Merv to Samarcand, as all one has to do is to take a railway ticket at Merv and get into the train. If you are thirsty, you go to the restaurant car and



SAMARCAAND.

order what you want. There is no need, now, for leathern bottles, barrels, camels, and guides. This is better than it was in our time, though I should be sorry to accept the situation of station-master at the well of Utch-Hadji, even with the salary of a prime minister, nor would Capus or Pepin be any the more ready to take it. Our first stage finished at Samarcand, and we are once more in Russia.

The Russians have established order in Turkestan first of all,

SARTHIAN WOMAN.

then in the Ferghana, and finally in Turkomania. Merv was captured without a blow being struck, thanks to the strategy of the chiefs of the province of Akkal. The Tekkes were made to understand the might of the Russian empire; they were won over by good treatment and by presents opportunely distributed, their khans being propitiated in this way. The troops of the Czar took possession of the Maour of the ancients, and since their arrival there have been no more Alamans, no more slaves sold,

and the Turkomans are gradually accustoming themselves to the novel situation. The more turbulent among them form a sort of militia, and those who were noted for their plundering propensities are employed as guides and messengers. Many of them took part in the struggles of Kuchk and Pendeh, and they now find that they are treated like brave men, as they are led out to fight side by side with their adversaries of yesterday, and against

A SARTHIAN THEATRE MANAGER.

whom? Why, against their hereditary foes, the Afghans. It did not take them long to see that of all the peoples surrounding them, the Russian people is the best and most honest; and as it is also the strongest, and as it respects customs and prejudices, and gives offence to no man, the Tekkes have taken the hand which was held out to them, and do not look back with overmuch regret to the past. The poor, however, of whom there are a

STREET DERVISH.

great many, are discontented, as the raids of the Persians were a means for them of balancing their budget, while now they are reduced to profound distress, and are obliged to till the ground. They want water, which the Russians will provide for them, as they have already done seed when it ran short. As long as they can get water, toleration, speedy, stern and equitable justice, and have their taxes levied fairly, the people of Central Asia do not, as a rule, ask for anything more than this, and the Turkomans, it is to be hoped, will get what they so well deserve.

My readers will perhaps be surprised to hear me speaking of men who traffic in human flesh as being worthy of esteem. But such is nevertheless the truth. The European who leads a sedate life, in the midst of a well-ordered society, in which there is no lack of policemen and laws, who reads his newspaper after breakfast, takes a long time deciding upon a coat with his tailor, and who has been brought up in the idea that man is a highly respectable being whose happiness ought to be the aim of all his fellowmen, naturally imagines that a Turkoman is of necessity ferocious, sanguinary, and vile, that he is a wolf, and that the human beings he sells are as inoffensive as sheep.

But the Russians will tell you that, with rare exceptions, the Turkoman is gentle, affable, and hospitable, very frank, and true to his word, while his victims are the most lying of men. They can only be compared to the negroes of Senegal, who either serve or combat the French troops so loyally. I could say much more in favour of the Turkomans, who have been given a bad name, which they do not deserve. They have the sterling qualities of the Turkish race, than which none has been more calumniated, and which merits better treatment.

The Turkomans are very much liked by all who know them, and I hope that the Russians will set them a good example. This is, I think, our fifth visit to Samarcand, and after sending off

our collections made *en route*, and some letters, we shall endeavour to make our way into Afghanistan and Kafiristan, and so to India. The reader, who has accompanied me so far, may at once be told that our great wish is to reach India overland, and I will do my best to interest him during the remainder of the journey.

A BAZAAR SCENE IN SAMARCAND.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM SAMARCAND TO THE AMU.

Arrival at Samarcand—Projects as to Afghanistan—The departure—Story about the fever at Yakabag—By the Sanguirdak to Hissar—Nomads at the close of summer—The Lullis—Karatag, a story of the past—Cabulis becoming land-owners—A new era—Agitation in the public mind—A claimant to the throne; his residence; his fate—The valley of Kafirnagane.

We reached Samarcand this morning (August 12th).

We left Katti-Kurgane at midnight yesterday in a telega, into which we all three managed to squeeze. Throughout the whole night we were jolting over the deserted and dusty region which precedes the rich oasis of Samarcand. And as true pleasure is always the reward for some discomfort, before enjoying a cool temperature while lolling in the shade by the brink of babbling waters, we swallowed an enormous quantity of dust.

It is true that we had some compensation, the night being so fine and so luminous, almost like day, that it did not demand a great effort of imagination to fancy that the moon was gradually becoming a sun. The dust which did not find its way into our

throat, blocking it as sand does a river's mouth, undulated behind us in immense columns and shone like silver. The landscape was very grandiose but simple, with the plain, the moon, the vault of heaven, and a profound calm brooding over the vast solitude through which our telega took us.

By daybreak we had passed the first village, fed by the waters of the Zerabchane, and, with the sun already scorching hot, met on the dusty roads among the canals of the oasis, its rice fields and its trees, the battalions of Russian sharpshooters returning from the grand manœuvres. They were marching with the supple and measured tread of men accustomed to travel long distances. Then Samarcand appeared to us enveloped in mist; we passed through the suburbs and were lost beneath the thick arcades of verdure in the Russian quarter.

We found comfortable quarters in a straw hut, in the Botanical Gardens, which are under the direction of one of our old acquaintances. We remain at Samarcand just long enough to pack up our numerous ethnographical collections, to complete them, and to write our letters, then getting ready to continue our route—that is to say, we long to discover some way of getting into Afghanistan.

The report of our arrival has got abroad in the city, and at the hour of the siesta we received a visit from our former followers. First of all there was that worthy fellow Klitch, neat as usual, active and black-bearded, despite his advancing years; then came Abdu-Zaïr, obsequious as ever, and Rachmed, who had accompanied us during our last journey as far as Tiflis. He is delighted to see us again, and kisses our hands with much emotion. When I ask him if he will come with us, he says that he will send one of his brothers to fetch a horse which he had left in the mountain, and which will be just the thing for such a journey. He does not ask what his wages are to be; he has retained a pleasant recollection of his masters and will accompany them anywhere.

We tell him that we propose to go to India by way of Afghanistan, Kafiristan, and other inhospitable countries.

He says that he does not mind that as long as there are *tamacha* (festivals or amusing sights), and that his brother shall go and fetch the horse. After having drunk some tea with Menas, he makes off.

Rachmed is known at Samarcand and enjoys a certain reputation in the djiguite circles. We commission him to recruit two or three of them who have already crossed the Amu and who will be able to act as guides in Afghan-Turkestan.

OUR SERVANT MENAS MAKING UP HIS MIND.

Several come to see us, and we offer them very high wages, quite five times what they are in the habit of getting. They hesitate, and ask for time to consider the matter, finally refusing on the ground that they will be risking their lives, that they know of many who have been into the Afghan country during the last few months, but that they do not know of any who have come back. "It is nice," they say, "to earn a good round sum of money; but it is not so nice to lose one's head."

So we shall have to be content with Menas and Rachmed in the way of a regular army, and we shall recruit some irregulars on the way for the conveyance of the baggage. In Asia, there is never any lack of loafers and men with no occupation, who are ready for anything, in the bazaars, and we shall be able to attach them to our persons all the more easily because they are often on point of starvation. Hunger draws the wolves out of the wood.

On the 13th of September we leave Samarcand in the evening, and go to spend the night at Amman-Kutan, in the midst of splendid plantations, due to the energy and perseverance of General Karalkoff. This work, commenced during the lifetime of General Kauffmann, and warmly encouraged by him, was interrupted during the sway of the governor-generals who succeeded him, and it is a great pity that such should have been the case. There are now superb clumps of trees on the slopes where nothing but rank grass formerly grew, and the flanks of the mountains, before bared and denuded by streams which were not regulated in their course, are now fertilized by fresh springs which the roots of the trees so judiciously planted keep chiefly underground. The site would be a delightful one for a sanatorium, which the Russians might easily erect at the gates of Samarcand.

The next day we cross the pass of Tachka-Karatcha, with which we are so familiar, and it is dark when we descend towards Bokhara, the frontier of which is marked by the sky-line of the chain of mountains. It is very difficult to advance in the dark, for the steep path is full of loose stones or else crosses very slippery rocks. Capus, who is trembling with ague, will not soon forget this bit of road. On the 15th, we change horses at Chahr-Sabz.

To-day (the 16th), we start for Yakabag, on the sides of the mountain. Entering a valley, we see to the north, on our left, the remains of a ruined fortress upon some knolls which compel the river to make a bend at this point. The walls of the fortress wound round the sides of the knoll which they formerly enclosed and the extremity of which is now visible in the distance. A flock of goats was browsing there, one of them being perched on the top of the wall like a sentinel. Upon the left bank of the river, facing this knoll, the village of Yakabag is built upon the slope of a higher hill, and from the bottom of the ravine, the top

of a minaret, which glitters as if covered with enamel, rises into the sky. In the further distance, the mountains, shrouded in a slight mist, lift their heads, and Yakabag is very like Granada in its way.

The water of the river is abundant and cool, and as our baggage is a long way behind, we wait for it on the banks, ladling out the water with our hands, and drinking as much to pass the time as because we are thirsty. The more I see of Yakabag, the more I think it like Granada, the plain we have crossed being as fertile as the huerta of the Spaniards.

We see a horseman coming out from the town, and upon his

IN SIGHT OF YAKABAG.

getting up to us, he says that he has been sent to meet us by the beg, who is confined to his bed. He is very old and wrinkled, and is riding a very poor horse. He asks us to follow him, and goes on in front without saying a word. Another horseman is waiting for us on the opposite side of the river. He salutes us, extends a bony hand, bows, and without opening his lips, puts himself at the head of the troop, stooping very much over his horse's neck. The new-comer is yellower and more decrepit than the first horseman.

As we approach the village, we see cows, without any one to look after them, grazing upon the slopes, and in the bazaar all the shops are shut. Beneath a porch, a number of men crouching

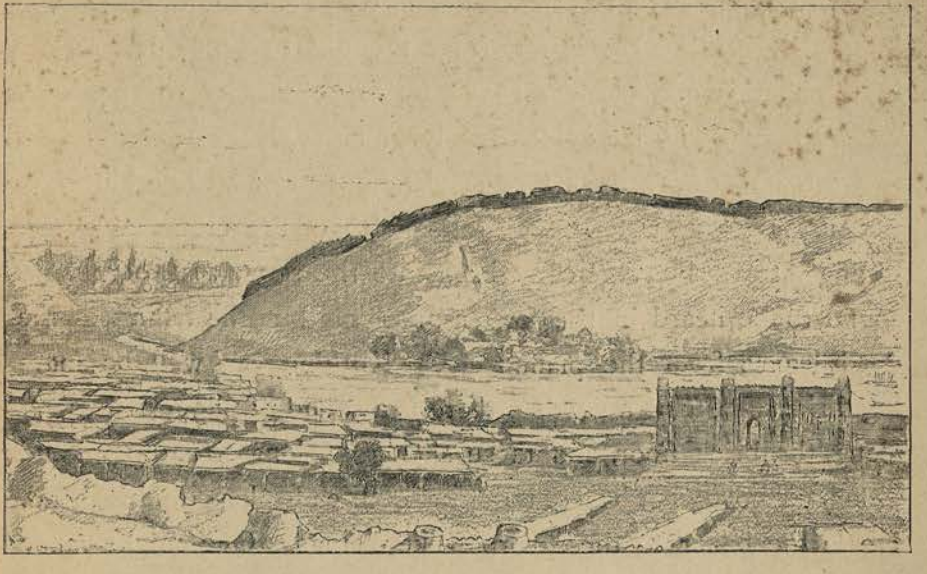
like animals on their haunches, with sallow and apathetic faces, just cast up their eyes as we pass, but do not move. There is no one in the streets, and no women peep through the half-open doors, nor are there any children on the roofs. As the path ascends, we see a medressé, but it has neither roof nor windows; there are no students in its courtyards, nor is the sonorous voice of any mollah to be heard there. Pigeons are flying to and fro above it, and a number of jackdaws have their home among its walls.

On reaching the platform in front of the fortress, we see no sentinel at the gate, which is open, though two or three men, with sombre and sunken faces, are standing about. There is evidently a lack of soldiers, for there are more arms hanging from the walls than there is any use for. The guns have no fuses, and the pointed lances of the *caraouls* (watchmen) are covered with rust.

In the grand courtyard, the beg is standing upon a terrace, supported by two of his servants, having left his bed in order to greet his guests. He does so in a weak voice, and looks as if his chin had scarcely the strength to bear his long white beard; his fingers are as thin as claws, and the skin is quite transparent. He has a hooked nose, his skin is more wrinkled than that of a mummy, and his cheeks as hollow as those of a corpse. His frame trembles under his long pelisse, and the men who are holding him up do not look to be much better. After giving us a welcome, he is carried back to bed.

From the top of the ramparts the eye rests upon the delightfully verdant plain, winding among bare hills, which form a circle around the fortress. This circle opens in a south-westerly direction towards the plain where Chahr-Sabz develops the sombre mass of its oases, preceded by green plantations dotted here and there like outposts about a camp. The sky is purple, the mountains in the horizon assume a violet hue, and the river at our feet runs red, like blood.

There is no smoke to be seen issuing from the roofs of the houses upon which we look down, and the only living beings to be seen are a woman unloading a donkey, a picketed horse lying down, and a man upon a housetop saying his prayers, as rigid as a statue. No sound of life is audible. The walls of the fortress have cracks which make it appear as if they might collapse at any moment, while the nests of the storks, whose droppings have spattered against the wall, are all deserted. Upon a level with the eye, there is nothing visible but bare hills.



YAKABAG.

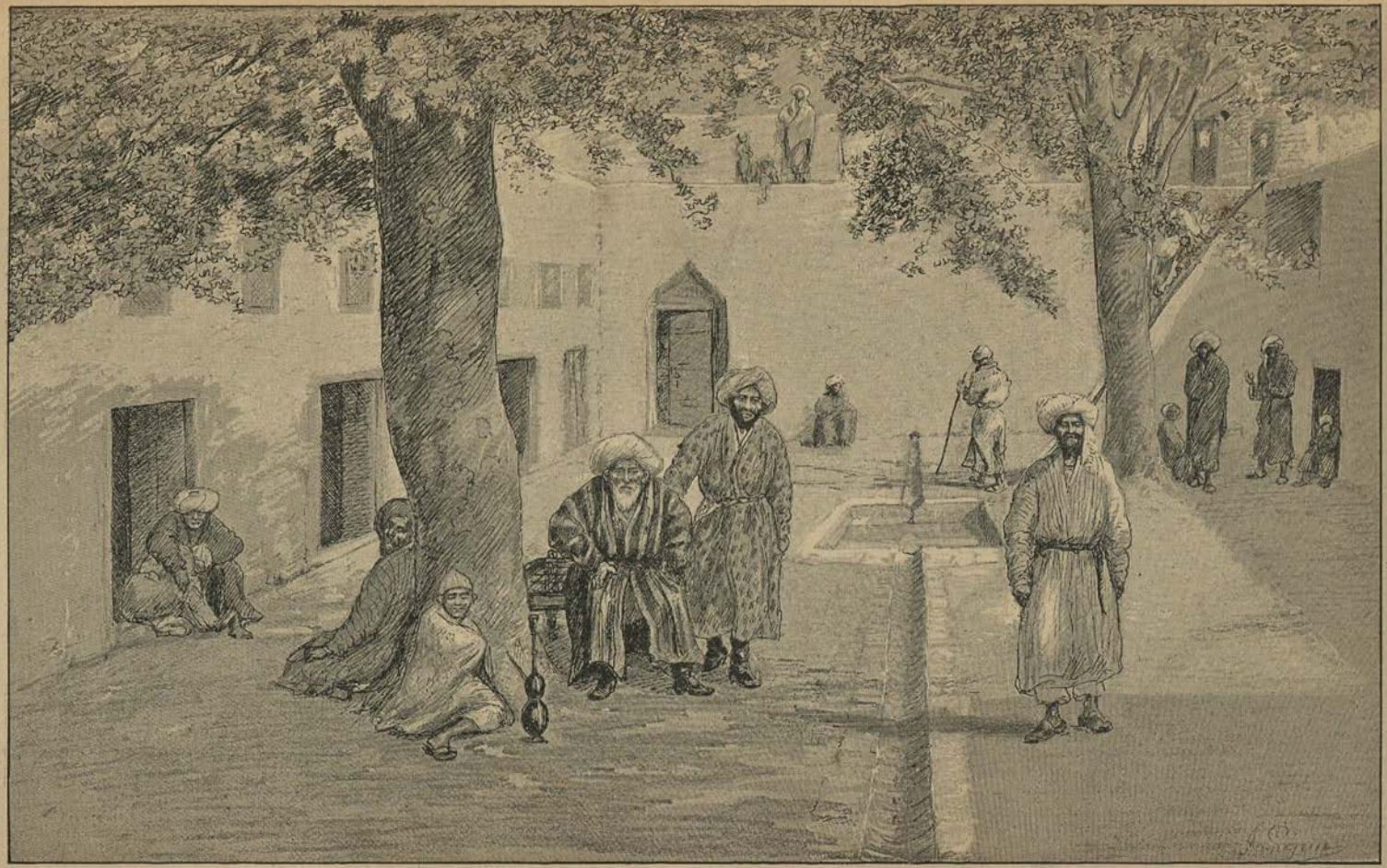
We return to our chamber, situated between the main court-yard and the garden, where some large plane-trees overhang the stagnant water of the cistern. The *mirakor* (master of the stables) comes to see us, and he has only one eye and trembles all over; then comes the *mirza* (scribe), who complains of pains as he puts his hands upon his stomach, his back, and his legs. He is accompanied by the youngest son of the beg, who takes a watch out of his pocket, and asks us if its time corresponds with ours. There is a very great difference, as we find. He explains to us how he

puts on or puts back the hands, for he has some notions of astronomy, and a table showing the rising and setting of the sun, compiled by Ulug-Beg, the great khan. We ask ourselves whether perchance, we have fallen upon some enchanted palace, or whether we have suddenly awakened the contemporaries of Ulug-Beg out of their long sleep.

Every one asks us for some remedy, for every one is ailing. An invisible mollah breaks the silence by a call to prayer—a brief call, without an echo, mournful as a death song. Where can we be? It occurs to us to inspect the fortress, and we find that it is inhabited. In the rooms which we thought to be empty, we see lying about in odd corners, rolled up in pelisses or frieze cloaks, human beings who are evidently alive, for the cloaks heave. Near the kitchen, under a sort of shed, about twenty individuals of various ages are stretched out full length or are crouched down, gazing into vacancy. I come back into the room, and there is no sound to be heard in the fortress, nothing but the falling of the dead leaves from the plane-trees. Nothing can well be more lugubrious. All of a sudden, there is a sound of slippers flopping along the brick floor, and these slippers belong to a ragged and ill-kempt boy, who has got a tray of bread-cakes on his head. He is the baker to these corpse-like beings. One might fancy that some evil deity had breathed corruption into the blood, and had frozen the marrow of the inhabitants of an accursed palace.

Night comes on, and the tom-tom of the watchman resounding at long intervals sounds like a funeral bell.

Is this all a dream? Not so—the fact is, that during the summer the village is evacuated. But an epidemic of fever has occurred at Yakabag, and the sufferers from it have assembled in the fortress, while the rest of the inhabitants have fled with their flocks to the mountain. The fields are not cultivated, and the town is as deserted and silent as a cemetery.



COURTYARD OF A PALACE AT YAKABAG.

This morning, with the sun shining brightly, flocks of crows are croaking above the fortress, and below, a few human beings are moving about near their dwellings, like insects attracted out of their holes by the heat of the day. We are glad to leave Yakabag, guided by the same old Uzbeg who had come out to meet us yesterday. He is more communicative, perhaps because we are going uphill, and so getting further away from the fever.

After leaving the gardens where the apricot-trees are very numerous and the djedda fruit nearly ripe, we gossip together as we ascend the valley. I question the aged Uzbeg.

"Do you belong to Yakabag?"

"No; it is a miserable place."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Baïssonne, with the beg, in whose service I have been all my life."

"Why did he leave Baïssonne?"

"Because the new emir sent thither his eldest brother, the Toura of Kissar."

"Is that the toura who, according to custom, should have been the emir?"

"Yes."

"Is it right that his younger brother should have taken his place?"

"No; the custom handed down by one's ancestors ought to be respected."

"Who helped the present emir?"

"The Russians, it is said. Moreover, his father, before his death, selected him as his successor."

"What do you think of the Russians interfering in the matter?"

"I think that the Russians have done a service to the country, for at the death of an emir there are always a great many

competitors, the different sons are never agreed, and Bokhara, distracted by many pretenders, is always more or less convulsed."

Then the old man, who has had enough of questioning, cuts the conversation short by saying that what God has done is well done.

In the evening we arrive at Kalta-Kul, situated to the north of the valley, which runs east. We passed through several villages inhabited by Uzbegs. The bed of the river, which is more than half a mile broad, is partly cultivated, and there are rice-fields, clover-fields, poplars and willows, with large herds of cattle in the meadows. There are a great many walnut-trees along the roadway or around the cottages, while at Kalta-Kul, where the fertility and the fever alike cease, at an altitude of about 4900 feet, there is a large growth of grapes with very long berries, much inferior, of course, to the Fontainebleau Chasselas.

The population is Uzbeg, and it is miserably poor, living in much the same manner as the Tadjiks of Kohistan, to whom we paid a visit when we were travelling in this region before. Like the latter, they spend the summer in making preparations for the winter. A similar state of things has imposed upon people of a different race the same conditions of existence. It is in the mountain more especially that one finds this to be the case; it would seem as if mountain-life shaped men in one mould.

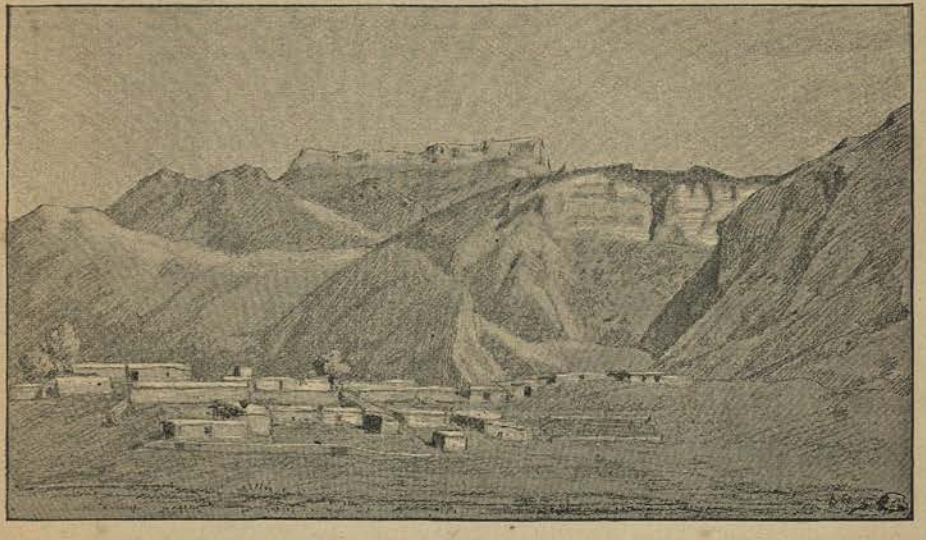
Upon the 18th, we sleep at Tashkhurgan, at an altitude of 6550 feet, remarking that barley was grown almost up to this altitude, though it was very short and thin.

Upon the 19th, after going over a pass about 13,000 feet high, we arrive by very steep paths in the narrow valley of Sanguirdak, the waters of which flow down into the Surkhane, and thus we have crossed the Hissar chain.

Upon the 20th, after a rather colder night in the open than we had bargained for, we rest in the village of Baktcka, which lies hidden in a gorge and is inhabited by Tadjiks, who take fright at

our appearance and fly in all directions, leaving their dogs to receive us with anything but hospitality. In the afternoon, we go to encamp under the superb plane-trees of the village of Sanguirdak, on the public square, and while we are putting up our tents, some gipsies who are encamped close by come to watch us, Pepin's camp-stool exciting great merriment. Sanguirdak is a village partly Uzbeg, partly Tadjik, a proof that the plain is not far off.

Upon the 21st, we descend to Dahana, an Uzbeg village con-



TASHKHURGAN.

taining a few Tadjiks. We wade the river several times, and we notice smoke issuing from the flanks of the mountains, a number of people inhabiting the grottoes, of which they have made their summer dwellings.

On the 22nd, by way of the broadening valley of the Sanguirdak-Darya, we reach the valley of the Surkhane, the approach to which is indicated by the tall columns of smoke caused by the grass that is being burnt. At Saridjui, we halt near the residence of the chief, under a plane-tree which is about thirty-seven feet diameter at six feet above the ground, and upon the banks of the river

Tufalanque, the sonorous name of which signifies that it is wont to swell suddenly and rush violently into the plain. Delicious trout are caught in it.

Upon the 23rd, we quit this delightful spot and cross to the left bank, where we find ourselves upon an elevated steppe. To the north, the mountains are hidden in the clouds, with heavy rain falling. As we come out into the plain we meet Uzbegs who are following the same route as ourselves, but more slowly. They are coming down from the *lailag* (summer encampments) on the mountain, and are about to settle into the *kichlak* (winter encampments) of the valley, where they put up their tents between four walls, as much sheltered from the wind as possible. They travel in sets, each family forming a group, and some are poorer than others, so that social inequalities exist even among the pastors.

The men ride on in front, driving the cattle, cows, and horses before them. The eldest of their sons accompany them, and they are all mounted, the poorer upon oxen, which have had a ring run through their muzzle, with a cord passed through it to guide them with.

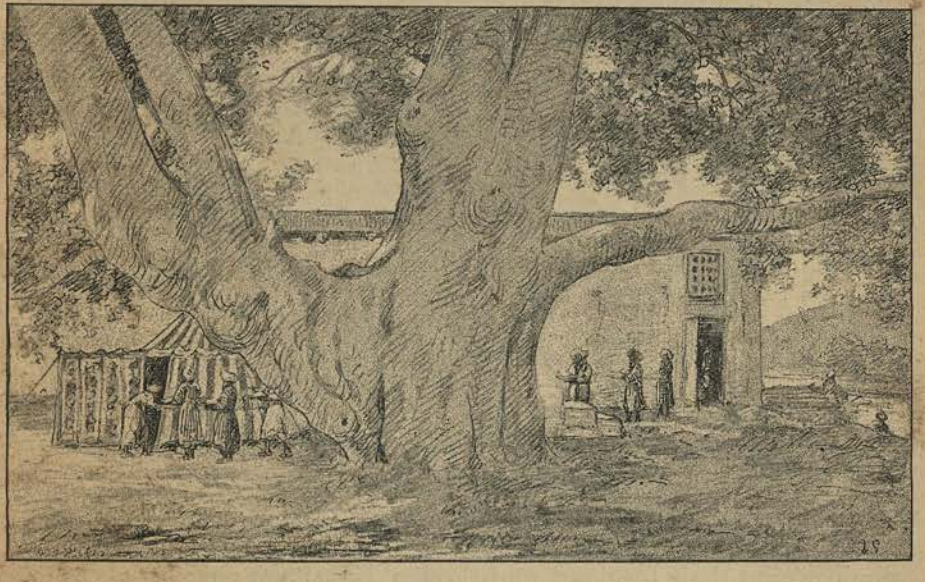
The lambs, the goats, and the calves are under the charge of the younger children, who are Mogul in appearance, like their fathers, and whose cheeks are blue with the cold of these September nights. They are armed with long poles and shod with loose boots or leather abarcas with the hair left on them. They wear the cast-off clothes of their fathers, and these clothes, if clothes they can be called, do not fit them, the sleeves, when any remain, being tucked up, and the skirts doubled up and tied with horsehair to the waist. Some go bareheaded and others wear a *tepe* (conical cap) or turban which has never been washed.

But they have regular teeth, as white as ivory, and their dark chests stand out, looking sound and strong beneath their rags. If

they have not fine worldly prospects, Allah has vouchsafed them the best of health.

They go quietly along, though they look rather startled when they see our eyes fixed upon them, giving a cut of the whip to the animals which lag behind, and whistling incessantly to their flock.

Further behind come the women, mounted on donkeys, the oldest first, with the aspect of the dread Persicaa. A young mother on foot, with an infant child, is holding on to an ox,



ENCAMPMENT AT SARIDJUI.

which has a wounded goat tied on to its back, while the goat's kid is in a bag placed on the back of a donkey, which a pretty little girl about eight years old, with a wild and shy look, is riding. Her mother is giving suck to a new-born child as she walks along.

We pass other Uzbegs who are better off, whose wives, nicely dressed, are riding handsome horses and chatter like magpies. Horsemen are driving before them troops of stallions, while rough-haired dogs are keeping flocks of sheep together. They raise a cloud of dust, and though the sky is overcast, the heat

is very torrid. One would never think that it was the dread of winter which was driving these people down into the plain.

But the swallows have been gone for some time, the storks have deserted their nests and are no longer to be heard snapping their beaks from the summit of the mosques, and summer is drawing to a close. The autumn in these countries is very short, and the pasturages where they encamped for the summer are used up. This is the best proof that it is time to prepare for winter. Moreover, the eagles are hovering over the valley and preparing to start, though they need be less in a hurry to do so than the other birds, for they are sure to light upon a dead horse, a wounded kid, or a stray lamb bleating after its mother.

We turn to the left and skirt the spurs of the mountain, having to our right the cultivated valley, with rice-fields watered by the Surkhane, and we pass through an encampment of gipsies, who are to be seen wherever one goes, and who all seem to have the same occupations. These dwell beneath a very primitive shelter of reeds and tents—two poles bearing up a piece of cord tied to stakes, over which is stretched a piece of cloth. A number of brown-skinned children, quite naked, are playing about. They have a great many horses, which they clog, by putting an iron chain round their forelegs, and they adopt this precaution because the natives regard them as intruders and would not hesitate to steal their horses if they wandered too far from the encampment. The women, with their breasts wobbling as they go, are running about to keep the cattle from straying, tapping them with poles which they carry over their shoulders like rifles. They are dressed without any regard for elegance, wearing a long linen chemise, loose drawers, and a handkerchief tied at the back of the head, with bare feet. This is the dress of the women of the country, but in a very *negligé* style.

These Lullis make sieves and cradles, which they trim in very

bright colours. They are not at all unlike the natives, especially the Tadjiks, and many of them have the same kind of eye, the cornea touched with pigment, as among the Hindoos, while a few have the small Uzbeg eye. Here, as in other places, the women are not notable for their conjugal fidelity.

Upon approaching Rigar, the rice-fields are very numerous, and the country is very rich, owing to an abundance of water. Here we see painted thatch roofs, as in the Talich, upon the

LULLIS.

shores of the Caspian Sea. We question the inhabitants as under—

"Does it rain in this country?"

"Yes."

"Much?"

"Yes."

"You don't suffer from fever?"

"Yes we do; very much."

In Central Asia, as elsewhere, when one comes to a region where the rainfall is heavy, the roofs are very steep; here, moreover, the rain, while contributing to the richness of the soil and of

the inhabitants, also entails fever, which is the reverse of the medal.

After a halt at Rigar, a large village peopled by Uzbegs and Tadjiks, we trot along, as soon as we have left the cultivated district behind us, upon a winding road which threads its way among the chalk hills and reminds me of several deep roads in Champagne.

Karatag being at the entrance of a gorge in a valley, we pass through a narrow defile which reminds Menas of a certain spot

KARATAG.

near Zulficar, if not Zulficar itself, where the Russians had a skirmish with the Afghans. And, by an association of ideas, Menas begins to talk about fighting with Rachmed, both of them being quite in harmony on this subject. They regard war as the best thing in the world. But when they come to discuss courage, they cease to be of one accord, for one has the ideas peculiar to the Caucasus, the other those of the steppe. One has all the dash of a western desperado; the other the wariness of an eastern adventurer.

Menas thinks a man ought never to run away, while Rachmed is of opinion that, under certain circumstances, it may be the best thing to do. A man should act in accordance with the object he has in view and the forces at his disposal; but, if he is compelled to fight, he should exclaim "Allah Akbar!" and die with sword in hand.

They are agreed as to an incident in the campaign of Geok Tepe related by Menas. It appears that the Turkomans would try to steal the rifles of the Russian soldiers, and that sometimes they would creep up to the place where they were piled and take them from right under the noses of the sentinels. An old Turkoman, worn out by age, ill and unable to fight, succeeded several times in this difficult enterprise. Without any arms, dragging himself along like a feeble old dog, he made his way into the encampment, and waiting his opportunity with the patience of a savage, motionless for hours at a time, he would secure the object of his expedition, and, under cover of the darkness, glide noiselessly away. Whereupon, Menas remarks to his friend—

"Is that a *batir* (hero)?"

"Vallah, he is one."

So we reach the wooden bridge of Karatag, leading to the left bank, where the village is built, partly in the valley, partly on the side of the mountain.

At Karatag, we meet the Beg of Hissar, who has within the last few days, succeeded the eldest brother of the present emir, who has just made his submission and has retired to Baïssonne. From time immemorial, the Hissar district was, as it were, the dauphiny of Bokhara, and it was there that the heir presumptive to his father's throne learnt how to govern. Thus the beg, whose guest we are, is the most powerful pasha in the country. He has just returned from St. Petersburg, whither his master has sent him to do homage to the new emperor and offer presents. He said

that he took part in all the *fêtes* there, and felt none the worse for it, adding that they loaded him with gifts. But since his return,

THE BEG OF HISSAR AND TARTAR BOY.

he has felt very unwell, and has suffered from pains in the stomach, which Capus promises to relieve.

The beg tells us that he was present at the coronation of the czar, and that the *fêtes* were indescribably splendid. He had

seen the large bell at Moscow, as well as the palaces of St. Petersburg, and the opinion of one of his servitors is that the true shah in shah is not the Persian sovereign, but the Russian czar—the real king of kings. The beg, who has the reputation of being a consummate diplomatist, takes care not to tell us his opinion about Russia.

He is a very handsome man, with a beard dyed black, his features are regular and delicate, and with his soft hand, on one finger of which he wears a costly diamond, he makes just such gestures as a cardinal would do, while his manners are most dignified. He seems quite overcome with sorrow, and the high post to which his master has elevated him does not console him for the cruel blows which fate has dealt out to him. He was proud of his numerous family, but a contagious disease has carried off all his children.

In three years he has lost twenty-two relatives. All he has left is a boy four years old, upon whom he has concentrated all his affection. He has brought back with him from St. Petersburg a young Tartar, who had been page-boy in an hotel, and, dressing him in Eastern attire, he has made him his interpreter and familiar. This youth is very sharp and advanced for his age (13), like most boys bred in large towns; he has rather a poor opinion of Bokhara, and a sovereign contempt for the natives. He says that you must use the stick to them, and he accompanies us in all our excursions, with a cudgel in his hand, which he lays freely about him. He is very anxious that we should prolong our stay at Karatag, and he says—

"Do stay on, and I will tell the beg to get up *fêtes* in your honour."

"It is quite impossible."

"What a pity you have to go! I saw a good many French at St. Petersburg, and I know a few words of your language. I

shall learn more; and if you were to remain, I should soon write French."

"But will you not forget your Russian?"

"No fear! I copy out two pages every day, and I read aloud. When I have had enough of it here, I shall leave. If any attempt is made to keep me, I shall write to Samarcand. Come and see the fortress. We will go through the bazaar."

"Do you mean the fortress on the right bank? It is not inhabited. What is there interesting there?"

"What! Don't you know that it was built in a night, by the will of Allah, at the urgent entreaty of a saint?"

So we go to have a look at this miraculous fortress, passing through the bazaar, which is crowded with Uzbeg horsemen of the Kungrad, Turuk, and Lakaï tribes. We also meet several Tadjiks there. The trade done does not seem to be large, the principal articles sold being Indian cotton stuffs, which the natives say are very fast colours, though rather dear; Russian soap and cottons, English needles and thimbles, leaden toys bought at Moscow, as well as small mills, which revolve when you blow into them. The only French goods are small boxes containing percussion caps, which appear to be of German make. Among the products of the country sold in the bazaar are rice, barley, wheat, sorghum, djiddas, grapes, and dried apricots. There are several saddlers and blacksmiths, and a few potters, who make dishes and vases of very pretty shape, and tastefully coloured and enamelled. But there are more druggists than anything else, among them being an Afghan and an inhabitant of the Punjab, who has come by way of Cabul, the Khulm, the Kulab, and Duchambe. This latter has not made a fortune by wandering about, for he is miserably clad, and is only too eager to return home.

Passing a wooden bridge, and turning to the right, the path is

steep, rocky, and winding, finally leading to the main gate, flanked by tall towers and facing east.

The fortress is rectangular in shape, upon the border of a ravine, with walls built of a mixture of clay and stone, the river flowing below. At the angles rise square towers, slight in construction as in Tuscany, and from these towers issue poles, which look like emaciated arms, and beams which would be very handy for hanging a man from. The tower in the left corner commands

BAZAAR AND FORTRESS OF KARATAG.

the converging routes and the bridge which leads to the bazaar. A large stone thrown down from the top would crush ten or twelve of the shopkeepers in its progress. Above the porches there are embrasures for the culverins and rifles, while on each side of the entry are the guard-rooms, which are merely galleries having in front of them a colonnade formed of split trunks of trees, which bend beneath the weight and are cracked by age.

Passing over the ruins of a wall, we find on our right the state rooms, looking on to a garden with a vast basin, formerly full of water. The rooms are large, and they still have a few stucco

decorations, with paintings of flowers and fruit in bright colours; upon the doors and in the panels are inscriptions forming very elaborate arabesques, there being, in fact, all the traces of the luxury of a great potentate. Contiguous to these rooms are the more unpretending dwellings of the male servants, the coach-houses, the sheds, the stables, and shelters large enough to lodge a considerable number of warriors.

There are numerous signs of a violent and rapid destruction having taken place, but of one which was interrupted and incomplete. The garden, being no longer watered, has lost all beauty and freshness. The kitchen garden is choked with weeds and thorns. The trees have been very badly used, for the branches have been lopped off and the bark stripped from them. They are quite dead, and their roots are sticking out of the ground.

To the left of the principal entrance, upon the southern side, a narrow door leads from the garden to a corridor opening on to the private residence of the potentate, which is separated from the guard room by a passage between two high walls. The principal room, the walls of which are still white, with a decorated ceiling, is on the first floor. It overlooks all the southern part of the fortress, having been so built as to afford an easy view of all that was going on in the plain, upon the neighbouring heights, in the village, and more especially in the harem.

The harem itself is formed of a garden and a number of small courtyards connected with one another, around which are buildings with balconies to them. The rooms were very numerous and varied in size, and there were special rooms for the ablutions, fumigations, preparation of ointments, and the thousand occupations which the keeping in order of the attire and ornaments of rich and unemployed women in the East entail.

All this is falling into ruin, and no repairs are made. The castle is accursed, and will never again be inhabited. It was the

theatre of bloody scenes which recall the bad days of our Middle Ages, when the petty nobles fought against the king, whose equal they had long been, and endeavoured, by means of the antagonism of the provinces, to preserve their independence or to wring from the suzerain new rights or dignities in exchange for a feigned submission.

Thirty years ago, when the soldiers of the White Czar were advancing slowly towards the east, through the Kirghiz steppe, supplying the banks of the Sir-Darya with redoubts which marked the route towards the rich oases, there lived at Karatag a chief who was famous among the Uzbegs, named Abdul-Kerim. He had illustrious ancestors, great renown among the tribes of his race, a taste for adventure, and a strong desire to amass a fortune. He knew how to work upon a feeling of discontent; he pointed out how the emir despised the Uzbegs, though one himself, inasmuch as he conferred the high dignities upon Persians and slaves bought from the Turkomans, and how, instead of surrounding himself with valorous and wise chiefs, he took counsel of his worst enemies, the dogs of Iran.

When Abdul-Kerim found himself at the head of a considerable group of partisans, and had collected arms and ammunition in the fortress, of which he had repaired the walls and raised the towers, he refused to pay the emir his taxes.

War soon commenced. First of all there were skirmishes and razzias, with the burning of villages. Then the emir, exasperated by this resistance, assembled a numerous army, won over the Tadjiks in Karatag, and besieged the fortress. It was taken, after a desperate resistance, and those who were able to escape took refuge in the fastnesses of the Karateguin and the Darvasse.

The beg, covered with wounds, was captured and beheaded, with a number of his followers. The native who accompanied us said, "The emir, in order to strike terror into his enemies, had a

thousand heads chopped off. The walls were thick with them, and there was one in every embrasure. My father had his cut off, and it was stuck up above the main gate. These heads attracted the birds of prey, which fought for the pieces of flesh torn from them, and the people of the valley trembled as they heard their cries. The fortress was partially destroyed, and no one was allowed to inhabit it. Moreover, the dyke which had been erected higher up the stream to bring the water on to the plateau was demolished.

"The beg appointed by the emir took up his abode on the left bank of the river, very low down, where he resides among his troops. No one has followed Abdul-Kerim's example since this exemplary punishment, and Karatag is entirely subject to the emir."

We descend towards the village, above which rises the smoke of the fires which have been lighted to cook the evening meal. There is a barking of dogs, a crowing of cocks, a braying of donkeys, and a sound of hammers on the anvil, while the river courses rapidly over the big stones, forming, as it were, demi-globes of crystal. The landscape is quite idyllic, with nature so perfectly calm, and the distance is full of soft tints, while the outline of the mountains is very grand. These are not the stage properties of a drama. The descendant of the rebel walks behind us, with his hands at his back, taking care not to put his naked feet on any pointed stones. He seems to be reflecting.

"You must know," he says, "that storks never build in the ancient castle of Abdul-Kerim. They do not like sad scenes."

September 26th.

By the hollow road going south-east through the chalk of the furthest spurs of the mountain, we arrive at the valley where the tents of the Lakaï Uzbegs are dotted about. The harvest is

being completed, and they are threshing the corn close to open silos, dug out in the upper part of the hills. The horses and oxen are pacing round upon the threshing floor, and close beside the grain is being winnowed by the simple process of throwing handfuls of it into the air, the grain falling one way and the chaff another. A little way further on, the straw is being piled up and put into sacks for the cattle.

Upon arriving near Dchangab-Darya, the rice-fields begin again. The natives have been late in harvesting, and the birds in starting for a warmer country. As the table is a bountiful one, they are in no hurry to leave it, and so they are enjoying themselves to their hearts' content, in spite of the stones which are being thrown at them. We can hear, too, the whizzing of stones from catapults which are aimed at them.

A small stream which crosses the road is salt, and we notice a group of men ascending its course with very rapid steps. They are carrying something on a stretcher, but, instead of going as slowly as they can, like bearers of a dead body in the West, they march at full speed, as if they were conveying some one, who was very ill or had met with an accident, to the doctor's. They go across the fields, and stumble in their hurry. They talk loudly, as if they were quarrelling, and there is not the least trace of sadness upon their faces. There are about ten of them, and they are dressed as plainly as usual. The wind blows up the shroud which covers the corpse, and the dead man's face is visible, with a look of great calm upon it. In advance are several men with poles, which will be used for forming a vault over the grave, and behind comes an aged mollah, leaning upon a stick. He is either less in a hurry or less alert, but he will arrive in time for the prayer.

I am surprised at the careless way in which these men perform an act for which with us the most indifferent display a semblance

of grief, or at all events a respectful air of gravity. I ask Rachmed how this is, and his answer is—

"With certain tribes of the Uzbegs—in his among others—it is the custom for the men not to lament when they lose one of their kin. He is buried without delay, and with no show of sorrow, for death is a thing to be taken joyfully. None the less, the good are regretted, though upon the day of their interment it is not advisable to let this be seen."

"Why?"

"It is the custom."

"I think, nevertheless, that you would have shed tears if you had been present when your mother was buried. You were fond of her; for, before leaving her, when you started upon your previous journey, you, who are the most careless of beings, gave her some money, and sent her some after you had started. You often speak to me of her."

"Yes, that is true. I like to speak of her, but I should not have shed tears. That is all very well for women. Do men cry in your country?"

"Sometimes."

"Ah! You have not the same customs. Each tribe has its own ways. Here is Hissar. My brother has told me that from a distance this fortress resembles Cabul."

Upon a double hill, rising out of the plain by itself, with denuded slopes, stands a white fortress, girt by lofty crenulated walls, and flanked with towers. The left part is higher than the other, and the whole of it is of a very varied and picturesque aspect, with a certain appearance of grandeur about it.

We were speaking of Cabul just now, and here to the left is a regular encampment of Cabulis. There are about a hundred of them—men, women, and children—living beneath some shelters made of reeds, inside a network of trenches, which are crossed by

means of embankments. These poor people have been in the country for five and twenty years. After having wandered about like gipsies, for whom they might easily be taken, they have made up their minds to settle down somewhere. The different families scattered about in the country have come together in this free spot, which the Toura of Hissar has given them. They began by digging out an irrigating canal, which they sowed with rice and melons. In course of time they surrounded their land with a ditch, until they were able to enclose it with walls; and, apportioning out the land, they have cultivated it to the best of their ability. Those who are the most energetic, or who have the largest families, are already cultivating the land outside the trench. These are the richer and the more active members of the tribe, over which they exercise the authority which is derived from wealth and resolution. They are far more advanced than the others, and we find them busily at work erecting rectangular mud walls, in which they have left an opening for a door. When a man has a door which can be opened and shut at will, he has the feeling of being a property owner. As soon as the walls of the enclosure are higher, it will be easy for the owner to insert into the corners poles which will be joined to other poles thrust into the ground, and so the roof will be formed. An opening will be made in it for the smoke, and the owner of the house will be able to warm himself at his own fireside.

UZBEG.

The Cabulis are quite cheerful over their work, and display

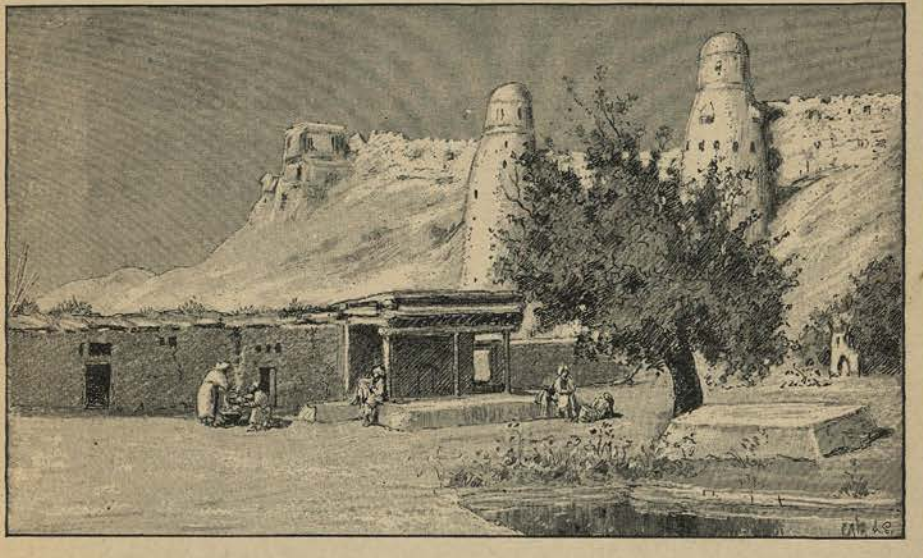
a great deal of activity. They are, perhaps, making a shelter to protect themselves from the winds of winter. The tribe will, no doubt, crowd into it during the cold season, and the workmen are cheered and stimulated in their task by the thought of the snug quarters they are preparing for themselves. And this is how the indolent acquire a taste for work, and how great cities have been begun.

Some of the Cabulis come out to see us go by. They are of the Afghan type, lean and tall, with very black eyes. The best-dressed wear on their heads a turban, rolled Afghan fashion, forming an angle in the middle of the forehead and coming down very low over the ears on each side. They tell us that distress has compelled them to leave their country, and with their exotic appearance they give us the impression of being an advance guard of India, the object of our dreams. They say that they have not the least wish to cross the Amu again and go back to Afghanistan.

The natives regard them as gipsies, and call them sometimes Cabuli, sometimes Moltani. In two or three generations these immigrants will have Uzbeg blood in their veins; they will have undergone a complete change of habits, mode of dress, wants and ideas, and their type will have become modified by contact with the men and things about them. In course of time, perhaps, nothing will remain but some nickname as a souvenir of their origin.

Before reaching Hissar, we meet some fat Uzbegs, mounted on strong horses. They are short, and resemble not a little the Kirghiz of Tian-Chan. Like them, they are very big-boned, have large faces and prominent cheekbones; but they are bigger limbed, and have, perhaps, eyes which are not quite so small. Altogether, they have much the same Turko-Mongol or Mongol-Turkish appearance.

The approach to Hissar is through some marshes teeming with excellent snipe and woodcock. The first thing which strikes us is the appearance of the dwellings. They do not look as if they belonged to Central Asia, for they have steep thatch roofs, instead of the flat roofs seen on the other side of the mountains, and on the banks of the Amu. This gives you the impression of quite a different kind of civilization. There is a good deal of rain in this region, and that is the cause of the marked



FORTRESS OF HISSAR, AS SEEN FROM THE SUMMER GARDEN.

change which may be observed on reaching Rigar. This is yet another incident of the journey which reminds us of rainy India.

The inhabitants of the town, or of the village, as it should rather be called, are none the better for this, as they are very yellow and sickly looking, being eaten up by fever.

We find quarters at the foot of the fortress, in a beautiful garden, watered by a stream, and possessing the tomb of a saint, hidden in the foliage of willows and poplars on the side of the hill.

We are told—what, as a matter of fact, we knew before—that the fortress is empty; that the toura who inhabited it had gone to Baïssonne, which his brother the emir had assigned him as a residence. There are a few men in charge of the dwelling, where the beg, now at Karatag, will shortly take up his residence. We ask if we may visit the fortress, and the gardener promises to show us over the whole of it to-morrow.

September 27th.

On waking up, we find the village in a very animated state, for this is bazaar day. Although there are not more than two thousand people here, the population is very mixed indeed. We recognize the heavy type of the thickset Uzbeg, the lithe Afghan, the hatchet-faced Arab; and, among the Lullis, who sell snuff and tobacco, the eye overcharged with pigment of the inhabitants of the hot plains of India.

This is because Hissar is situated at the head of two valleys, so to speak—that of Surkhane and that of Kafirnagane—and at the junction of the road taken by those who, for reasons of their own, cross the northern mountains, either by the Sanguirdak, or by Fan, or who are flying from Afghanistan or India. The latter reach Hissar, after having crossed the Amu, by the valleys of the Surkhane and of Kafirnagane, or by making a wide circuit over the mountains of Badakshan or Kulab. For at Hissar, up to the present time, fugitives were almost sure of finding an asylum, with help and a kindly greeting, from the second personage of Bokhara, the heir-presumptive to the dominions of the emir. He was in opposition to his father, whom he accused of having ruined his dominions by not leaning for support upon the sympathies of the men of his race. These views won for him the attachment of the neighbouring Uzbeg tribes, which clung to the ancient traditions, took pride in the great deeds done by their

forefathers, and nourished a hope, perhaps, that a struggle against Russia might have a chance of succeeding. These worthy people, quite ignorant as to modern military science, imagined that courage and devotion might overcome the discipline and strategy of the West. Some of them at Hissar refused to accept as an accomplished fact what at Bokhara was now regarded as a matter of course. The toura was not on good terms with the court, and gave a cordial greeting to the discontented of all countries, as long as they were outspoken in their approval of him, and flattered him to the top of his bent. The fact of people putting themselves under his protection gave him an exaggerated idea of his power and flattered his vanity.

Many touras have played a similar part at Hissar, which has a very interesting past. It has seen all the different conquerors of Central Asia; and the Arabs seized it as a preliminary to bringing Turkestan into regular subjection. Conquerors, refugees, and slaves have, one after another, shed some of their blood there; and the inhabitants of the hovels at the foot of the fortress have no marked type. Crossing has not improved them, and the common people are decrepit.

Apart from the cereals and the native products, there are few goods to be found at the stalls; the customers consisting of Uzbegs, who are not at all accustomed to luxury. We see, however, percussion caps from Linden, near Hanover; handkerchiefs, calico, needles, and matches, from Russia; English calico from India, and buttons from I don't know where, with a French trade-mark on them. Some hadjis have brought back from Stamboul a number of small bits of copper like medals, with which ornaments for women are made. There does not, at first sight, seem to be much business done. The Uzbegs have come to spend a few minutes at the bazaar, and they gossip as they kneel before some mutton or horseflesh on the spit. They

discuss recent events, the departure of the toura, the new emir, the Russians, and more especially the English, who are just now in the neighbourhood of Andkhoï, with brown-skinned soldiers, riding very small horses. They are said by the dervishes, who have seen them, to be countless in numbers, so there can be no doubt about it, and these troops must foreshadow war.

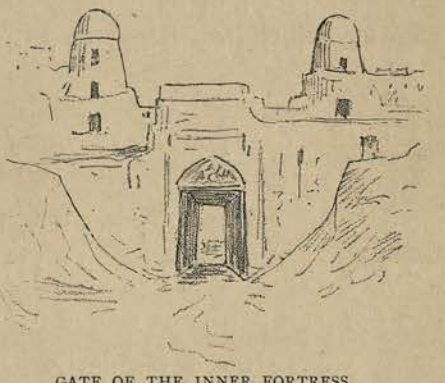
This refers to the British Boundary Commission, the escort of which consists, in reality, of from seventy to eighty soldiers. People exaggerate in the East beyond all conception, out of sheer laziness, the mind not feeling any craving for exactitude. The railway which the Russians are making, which has been opened

UZBEGS.

at Merv, and which will cross the Amu, is the subject of much conversation, and more than one of them shakes his head with an air of doubt when he is told that the Russians will throw a bridge over the Amu, and that "the devil's carriages" will go as far as Samarcand. The old men, who have passed all their lives in Hissar, and who have never crossed the mountains, will return to their tents with the conviction that the end of the world is at hand. It is the end of the Uzbeg world, and it will be the beginning of its transformation, or rather of its modification. Peoples change but little in reality; but when they are placed in novel circumstances, they make a different use of their race qualities. Because they act differently, it is erroneously concluded that they have been transformed. We French have changed very

little, despite centuries of defeats, victories and upheavals—despite centuries of action in brief.

Thus, the inhabitants of Central Asia were for a long time asleep; those of the oases found an employment for their aptitudes for petty commerce, cultivation of small holdings, and hoarding; those of the steppe, the nomads of Turkish blood, the descendants of those who had caused the West to tremble, no longer had any outlet for their courage and their spirit of discipline, as there was no chief to lead or marshal them. The cannon of Russia and the whistle of her engines have roused them from this torpor. At the present moment their brains are as agitated as those of our forefathers may have been by the discovery of America. They feel that a new era is opening for them. They are surprised at finding that this mass, which they had seen for some time hanging over their heads, has at last fallen to the ground. They feel themselves hemmed in and cornered by an invincible force, and, taking a correct measure of their weakness, they wonder what is going to happen next. They are not over-anxious as to the future which the Russians have in store for them, as the Russians are the masters, and their engineers do as they please with the lands of the emir, who is powerless to prevent them. Moreover, they have for some time regarded themselves as having no emir, nor have they made common cause with him, because he has not followed the advice of the Uzbeg chiefs, but has submitted to the influence of foreign servitors, and especially of Persians. And then the Russians have by no means a bad reputation. It is said



GATE OF THE INNER FORTRESS.

that they are affable and full of courage, and that they do not molest any one; so the Uzbegs have resigned themselves to the position, and are ready to pay their tribute to the "White Pasha." Henceforth, they will gravitate in the orbit of Russia, who will perhaps utilize their good qualities and common sense. Whatever happens, they will not be inactive, for the planet, whose satellites they have become, is not on the point of extinction, and is far from having completed its course.

We pay a visit to the fortress. An old servant of the toura acts as guide, and explains what he is showing us. We ask him if he has served long, and he replies—

"Yes; fourteen years."

"Why did you leave him? Why did you not share his fortunes?"

"Some retainers of the new beg came to see me and advised me to stay here. They said, 'Do not go to Baïssonne; the toura has not paid you your wages for many years, whereas the beg will let you have them regularly. By following the toura, you risk being arrested like him and having your head cut off!' That is why I have remained here."

"Is it true that he meditated making war on the Emir of Bokhara?"

"Yes, it is. This room where we are was full of rifles; he had over two thousand, with a lot of powder and bullets."

"Was he a kind man?"

"Yes; but his advisers were the ruin of him."

The Touradjane of Hissar is the second son of the Emir Mozaffer-Eddin, who at his death selected as his successor his third son, the reigning emir. According to the usual custom, the chief of the Hissar, being the eldest, should have succeeded his father. But the deceased ruler had willed it otherwise and had taken measures for the Russians to ensure the execution of his

will. It is said that his favourite son has more intelligence than the eldest one, and that he gave proof in several circumstances of great tact in governing his principality. But his brother was not at all pleased at being passed over, and the latter's *entourage*, which had been reckoning upon his accession to power, urged him to let his discontent take active shape.

The touradjane had remained upon intimate terms with another brother called the Katta-toura, who was the firstborn, and who had attempted to dethrone his father fifteen years before, taking refuge in India upon the failure of his attempt. The Katta-toura had written to his brother urging him to raise the standard of revolt and making him promises which he has only very partially kept. The assistance of the English was probably promised the Toura of Hissar, not perhaps very distinctly, but enough to confirm a discontented man in his intentions. So he collected arms and ammunition, assembled troops and excited the Uzbeg tribes to war, preparing for a rising.

THE EMIR OF BOKHARA.

But in the meanwhile the emir was kept informed of all these goings-on, and sent emissaries to his brother, urging him to abate

his anger and accept compensation. The negotiations went on for some time, and the toura held out as long as he based any hopes upon the Government of India sending black-bearded warriors to fight for him. But when he was tired of scanning the diplomatic horizon in vain, he bowed his head before his brother, came to as amicable an arrangement as is possible in these countries, disbanded his troops and pacified his followers, thinking only of securing his treasures, his family, and his person.

It is said that he is very rich, so rich that he would have got away already but for the countless bags of tangas which he has stored up in a vast room near the harem. His wealth kept him back, and the love of money proved stronger than that of tranquillity. It seems that in attempting to preserve one, he ran a great risk of losing both.

He has ten wives and a great many children, but of the large body of servants and retainers which he had about him only a few devoted followers remain, and he left for Baïssonne without any pomp or ceremony, taking with him his treasures as well as a chain riveted to his foot. He has not had all his arms taken from him, as no fear is felt of any one being tempted to brandish them in his cause; while he himself has lost all ambition.

I can say nothing as to what sort of a place Baïssonne is, but the residence of Hissar is not unworthy of a great Bokhara prince. We spent the day making a sketch, which we cannot give here. We went through all the rooms, and inspected every portion of the harem. The house bore the mark of having been recently inhabited, preserving the odour of its master, so to speak. In all directions were signs of a recent move, and this was a great piece of luck for us, as the houses of Asiatic potentates are closed to every one, especially to infidels.

Thanks to the explanations of the toura's old servants, our imagination was enabled to people the dwelling with its former inhabitants.

"This," we were told, "was where the toura liked to sit; from this gallery he could see without being seen.

"Close by is the table at which he entertained his intimate friends and transacted his business. You see below towers on each side of the large gateway; they were used as prisons. The towers are connected by a platform above the porch, with a balustrade against which the toura leant to watch the wrestlers on the bazaar square.

"This is the room in which he performed his ablutions before the prayers which he recited in this small chapel. Here is the

ENTRANCE OF PALACE.

passage through which he went to the harem, and this door leads to the grand reception room adjoining the chancellery, which is contiguous to the mosque and the treasury.

"Here is the bath; after taking it, he rested in this room upon a divan, sometimes in very pleasant company.

"All this square block of buildings was occupied by the women; the seamstresses on this side, and the servants on the other. This large room decorated with paintings was last week rich with carpets and cushions. This was where the toura's wives assembled when they were expecting a visit from the master; they were arrayed in their finest dresses, loaded with

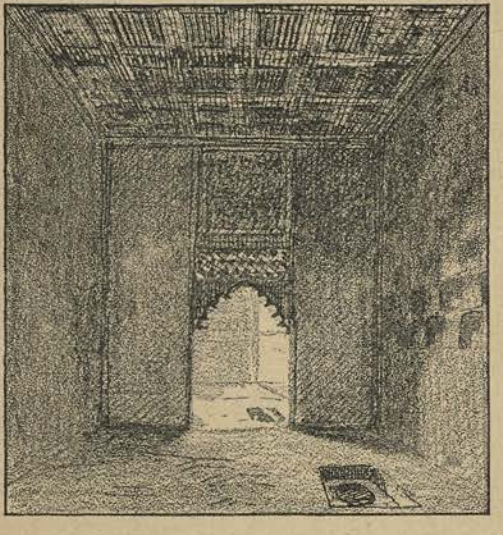
glittering jewellery, their faces painted and their bodies cunningly perfumed. A passage leads from there to a room of which you can see the door made of double trellis-work; it was reserved for the toura's favourite."

"Did he ever change favourites?"

"Sometimes. And as the toura liked to have a quiet home, he inflicted severe punishment upon the wives who were disobedient."

"How were they punished?"

"He had them flogged, and then confined in the narrow cell which you see between the kitchens and the fine room we are in now."



INTERIOR OF A ROOM IN THE HAREM.

The ladies' prison is close to the favourite's boudoir, just as the Tarpeian Rock is to the Capitol.

Questioning first one and then the other, we had a good look at the palace, which comprises a school, workshops of every kind, and all the buildings to be found in a small Asiatic town, for the fortress was a regular town. It was also a strong fortress, and below, opposite the dwelling of the chief, to the left of the principal entrance, there are buildings which serve as barracks, arsenal, and bakehouse. There is, besides, a whole village within the walls, which seem to have been added during some period of war or intestine troubles. These walls embrace an immense space of ground to the west, the whole gentle slope of the hill, which is very steep on the other side. A good many huts are still

ENCAMPMENT UPON THE BANKS OF THE KAFIRNAGANE.

standing, there are a good many meadows with cisterns in the middle, and a small stream of water trickles out from a spring. This piece of ground was available for the accommodation of auxiliary troops, and for picketing many horses, while from the higher ground an eye could be kept upon these troops in case of there being any doubts as to their proving true. It was here, also, that the wives of the soldiers in the garrison lived, and they could, if they felt so inclined, cultivate some of the patches of ground and grow melons for their husbands.

I have said more about this curious group of dwellings than I had intended, and I shall recur to this very interesting subject, for we were so fortunate as to be able to examine very closely what is perhaps the most perfect type of feudal residences in Central Asia. They served to explain to us many points in the history of this country, and at the same time, by a comparison which naturally suggested itself, various epochs of the past were evoked, and appeared to us as clear and palpable as things of the past can do in the present. Men follow pretty much the same road to arrive at the same goal; viz. the exhaustion of the race after it has reached its zenith. Some races go a quicker pace than others, which are tired out by a long march upon the toilsome paths of progress, which have started late, or which have been checked by insurmountable difficulties. By going to see the inhabitants of Central Asia, we can judge how many stages we have recently travelled. What are three or four centuries in advance?

September 28th.

We leave Hissar, with the intention of descending the valley of the Kafirnagane as far as the Amu, and, if possible, of crossing it near the confluence, where we are told that we shall find boats.

In the upper part of the valley, several villages are inhabited by the Tadjiks, who cultivate the most fertile part of it. At a

distance of two hours from Hissar, the only inhabitants are Durman Uzbegs, who are very poor, and the few kichlaks we see are very insignificant as far as Akmetchet, where we arrive on the evening of the 29th. Upon the banks of the river we saw several gold-finders, who were washing the sand on the banks, and obtaining a few grains of gold dust.

The narrow valley has a very desolate appearance. In the valley of Tuskane, an important salt-mine, placed under the protection of a saint, is worked by the natives. The salt is obtained from a very salt spring, each drop of water as it dries leaving a white powder upon the clothes. In the mountain we see a few small herds of cattle grazing.

At Akmetchet, we follow the right bank, the valley widening out, and being no longer the steppe. The kichlaks become more numerous, and the Darya multiplies its branches, forming ponds and marshy pools and irrigating rice-fields. There is more room to move about. The river bends about, and contains in its folds many islets, with thick growths of reeds, willows, tamaris, djiddas, and mulberry-trees.

There is a greater depth of soil as we get lower down. In the morning the mist was very dense, hiding the steep summits, and dimming the outlines of the lower parts of the mountain chain.

Akmetchet consists of twenty-four huts or tents; it is the "second town" in the valley after Kabadiane.

Before reaching Bachkala, we meet upon the banks of the river two or three Turkmen families, living in reed huts, which is a sign that we are approaching the Amu. They formerly inhabited Kerki, they tell us, and they left that country two years ago because they did not like it. They belong to the tribe of the Kuramas. The wretched Uzbegs, who wander about in the surrounding mountains, are Kungrads.

In the hamlet of Bachkala, near Kabadiane, there are many

mulberry trees, as the natives rear silkworms. Kabadiane is about an hour and a half from this village, upon the left bank of the Kafirnagane. We arrive there on the evening of October 1st. This town, or, to be more correct, this enormous village, is made up of farmhouses, standing amid islets formed by numerous canals. Their banks are planted with large or small plane-trees, which are pollarded. A great many silkworms are bred in this district.

The fortress, at the foot of which we lodge, is built upon a mound which commands the valley, here about five miles wide.

AN ENCAMPMENT AT KABADIANE.

FORTRESS OF KABADIANE.

CHAPTER VIII.

AMONG THE AFGHANS.

Our recruits—Tempest upon the Amu—Camels at the watering-place—Passage of the Amu — Stopped at Chur-Tepe — Negotiations — The authorities—The Ersaris—Traits of Afghan character—The chief of the posts at the frontier—Profession of faith—About the English—We are detained—Instructions asked for from Mazari-Cherif, then from Cabul—The "vagrants;" Jacob and Eleazar Turkomans—Escape—Philtre, exorcism—The cyanide of potassium—We are turned back—Our return to Samarcand.

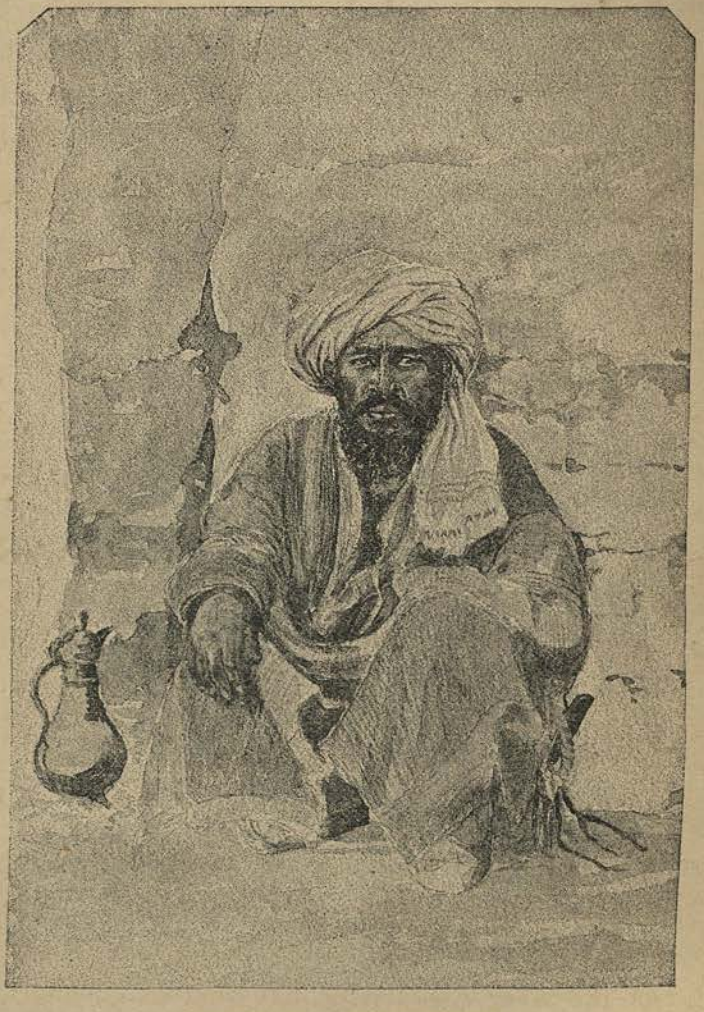
At Kabadiane we take the precaution of hiring a mirza—that is to say, a man who knows how to write—while we engage as *kiraketches* (muleteers), three Arabs, who are descendants of the conquerors of Bactriana. They say that they are of the Arab tribe of Balkhi. They formerly inhabited Afghan Turkestan, which they quitted several years ago. One of them was recently a soldier in the employ of the Toura of Hissar, and he has been idle since the latter disbanded his army. The ex-soldier and one

of the muleteers, with faces like satyrs, are afflicted with a slight limp. This is due to their having been for a long time in prison, with one foot chained to a beam, by way of punishment for some peccadillo. The mirza and two of the Arabs consent to cross the

PRISONERS AT KABADIANE.

Amu with us, and accompany us as far as Mazari-Cherif, as they know the road very well. As to the soldier, he will not upon any conditions set foot on Afghan soil, as it was not long ago that he ran away from Andkhoï, because "he was not happy at home."

The good man, who, with his swarthy complexion, pointed beard, and way of showing the whites of his eyes, reminds us of one of our fashionable painters, tells us what is generally known in the country, viz. that he chopped his wife's head off to punish her for



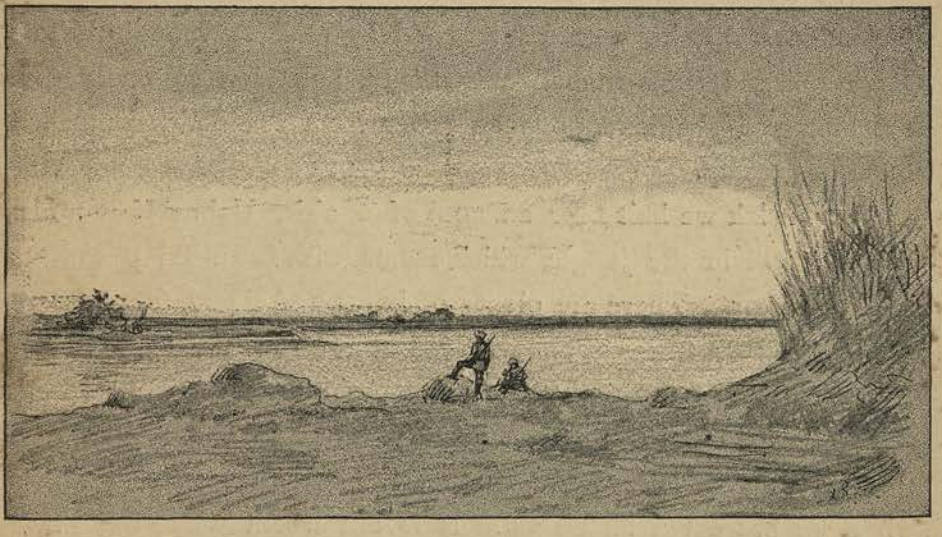
ARAB OF BALKH, OUR MULETEER.

being unfaithful to him, "which," he added, "there was the less excuse for her being, because I fed her well; we used to eat palao nearly every day."

From Kabadiane we reach Bishkent, by way of the jungle

and the steppe, expecting to find interesting ruins there; but the information we had received was incorrect.

Upon the 5th of October we proceeded through a sandy desert, and encamped in the jungle of the Amu, near the mouth of the Kafirnagane, a south-westerly tempest bursting upon us in the evening, and lasting all night. The howling wind bent down the reeds, making them undulate like a horse's mane, and crackle like thorns. The dust darkened the air, through which fluttered flocks of geese and swans, uttering short cries of terror.



JUNCTION OF THE KAFIRNAGANE AND THE AMU.

The banks of the river were rendered invisible by the washing up of the water, while, after a fire lighted in a hole quickly dug in the ground had gone out, the darkness was very intense. The din of the river was terrific, like that of an angry sea, and the canvas of the tent flapped up like a sail upon the top of a mast. Fortunately we were upon dry land.

In the morning the sky is clear, and we see upon the left bank of the Amu horsemen and armed men. These are the Afghan guardians of the ferry. To the south-east, the summits

of the Hindu-Kush stand out distinctly; upon the other side is Kafiristan. What a pity we cannot cleave through the air to it, like the swans, whose discordant notes we can hear over our heads!

A pilgrim, who is on his way to Khulm, will tell the Afghans that we are going to return by way of Shirrabad to Samarcand, and that we have given up the intention of crossing the stream, contrary to what had been reported. We intend to go along the river bank.

We encamp at Katun-Rabad, which was inhabited by Kara Turkmenes, who have been succeeded by Dali Turkmenes. The Kara pillaged their nomad neighbours, behaving so badly that the Beg of Kabadiane, upon an order from the emir, compelled them to decamp.

At Tuslak we halt near an aoul of wealthy Uzbeg Kungrads. We are still in the jungle, which teems with beautiful pheasants and wild boar. There are plenty of hares and tigers, for the path shows the fresh traces of one with a foot as large as a young camel. In the course of the night, the tiger has killed two camels; but the natives do not seem to be much alarmed at his presence, as this is his yearly custom. They will only set a snare for him when he has eaten an Uzbeg. It is not worth while bothering about two camels, for there are plenty of them.

Before sunset, at least a thousand of these animals are taken to drink of the divine water of the best of rivers. It is a strange sight to see these dromedaries coming out of the reeds, majestically shaking their heads, then collecting upon the bank and drinking in turn: those which are too impatient being kept in their place by the drivers armed with long poles.

The male camels go first, grunting and occasionally kicking out at some rival, with much more agility than might be expected from such clumsy animals. They all drink with outstretched

necks, putting their heads down and making a gurgling sound in different keys, according to their age and sex. The young camels, with scarcely any hair upon them and an almost invisible hump, are so weak on the legs that they can scarcely stand upright, and as they kneel down to drink, they remind one of little children who have a difficulty in getting upstairs. The females about to bear young are so distended that their stomachs look like the flanks of a lighter, though, upon the other hand, their humps do not seem so large. They walk along with the saliva dropping

TCHARÉHAMBÉ.

from their mouths, filthy and malodorous, despite their "interesting condition."

The camels as they drink never stop wagging their tiny tails, and they sometimes lose at one end what they take in at the other, like so many badly corked casks. Those which wait show their impatience as the others do their pleasure, by wagging their tails, and when it is their turn to drink, they jostle one another like sheep in their hurry to be first.

Those which have with difficulty been torn away from the pleasures of the bath are driven off by the horsemen, who whistle

to them and deal them blows, the dromedaries making a most uncanny noise as they shuffle along. There is very little to inspire poesy about these strange and ugly animals.

The same evening we sleep at Yangiarik, not far from the Surkhane.

Upon the 9th of October, we cross the Surkhane and sleep at Salavate, a village inhabited by the Tchagataï Uzbegs, some of whom are gigantic men. They say that they have lived there since the days of Timour.

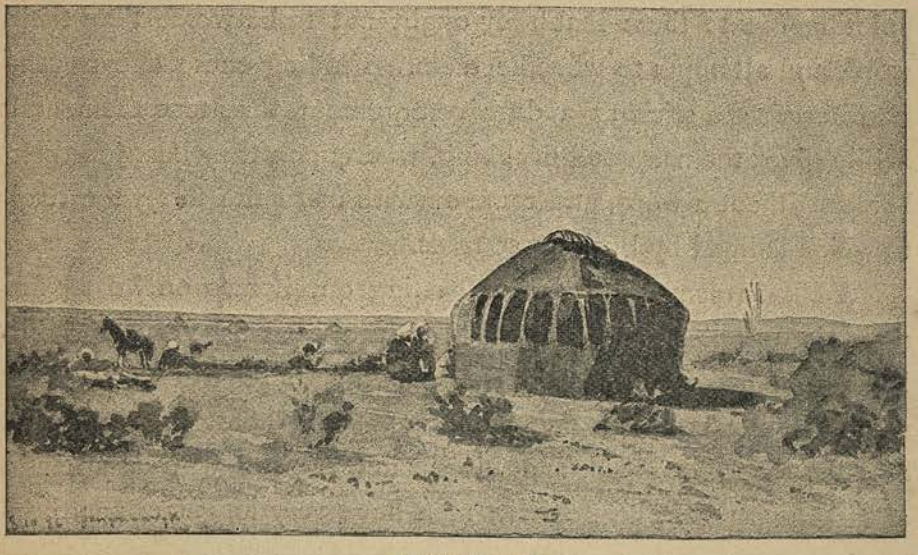
Having remained until the 13th in the ruins of the Termis of the ancients, we go on the 14th, past Turkoman farms, to Tchochka-Guzar, and it is from there that we are to cross the Amu upon the following morning in a Bokharan boat, leaving upon the right bank the baggage which is not absolutely indispensable, under the care of the deceived husband, and, taking with us only our instruments and our tent, proceed toward Bactrias.

The mirza seems always resigned to follow us, but his face does not express any great pleasure. The Arabs are gloomy, and in the evening they ask for payment of what is due to them, upon the ground that they want to send the money back to their families by a pilgrim. So we pay them. As for Menas, he gets ready for the passage of the Rubicon by breaking up sugar, while Rachmed puts the saddles in order, shoes the horses, and, with his friend, smokes innumerable ghalyans. Seïde—the name of the Arab who fed his wife too well—occupies his spare time in thrumming the domburak and humming tunes with the contented air of a man whose mind is easy.

October 19th.

We make over some letters to the Bokhara authorities, asking that they may be sent on to the chief of the Samarcand district, who will forward them to their addresses. We ask them if the boat

is ready, as was agreed upon the day before. They say that all is ready, but they beg us not to carry out our project, telling us that "the Afghans are the most treacherous of men; they are inhospitable and deceitful, promising you honey and giving you poison. The subjects of our emir are constantly having to complain, first because one of them has been unjustly held to ransom, then because others have been imprisoned without a cause, beaten and stripped of all their belongings. The other day, three mer-



AT YANGARIAK.

chants were killed on their way to Mazari-Cherif, and we cannot obtain any justice for this offence. Do not go there, for you will do so at the risk of your lives."

The mirza has met two friends, who strongly dissuade him from accompanying us, telling him that as soon as he has passed the Amu he will be arrested, and that the Afghans, when they have got tired of keeping him in prison, will kill him.

The mirza is as pale as death, and looks quite haggard, but he says nothing. His beg has ordered him to accompany us, and

he is terribly afraid of the Afghans. So that he finds himself between the devil and the deep sea.

The Arabs, who yesterday seemed quite decided to follow us, are less so at present. They are crouching under the wall, with their heads between their knees, with the obstinate look in their eyes of animals which refuse to advance.

We have their horses loaded, as our own are to remain here, and we leave Rachmed to bring them round to a better way of thinking. He begins by making them tempting promises, by pointing out to them that they ought not to be worse than their word, and attempts to wheedle them. Finding these efforts useless, he seizes a stick as a decisive argument, threatens them, and finally gives them a good drubbing, whereupon they bestride their horses without a word, and come on with us to the ferry, the road to which is lined by bushy rose-trees.

We have some difficulty in getting our horses on board, for there is no pier, and the side of the boat is very upright. Rachmed's horse falls into the water, which is regarded as a good sign by some, as a bad one by others. The horse is eventually brought to shore again, and his master escapes with a wetting of his baggage. The Bokhara men have very long faces as they wish us good-bye, just as if they were laying us in our coffins.

We land upon the other side of the river, in a small creek surrounded by tanks supplied by the stream, the waters of which are gradually getting lower. We land amid a small caravan of ragged Afghans, with faces like savages, armed with bucklers, swords, and lances. They are taking a load of salt, and one of them, who loses his temper with a disobedient camel, has his face convulsed with fury. They are evidently not at all of an accommodating disposition.

We load our horses as quickly as we can, jump into the saddle and start. But we are accosted by a mounted soldier who emerges

from the thicket. He wears a uniform we have never seen before, and our appearance seems to take him by surprise. He asks us where we are going.

"To Balkh."

"What for?"

"To see the ruins."

"What country do you come from?"

"From Fherangistan."

"I am at your orders."

He takes us perhaps for Englishmen. He makes a military salute and goes his way.

AFGHAN OFFICER.

It turns out that he is an officer in the Afghan army. He is armed with a revolver and an English cavalry sword. His headdress is a cap lined with fur and surmounted by a short and rather dirty turban. His vest is of black cloth with a red collar, his breeches are baggy, but tied in at the ankle, after the Afghan fashion, while on his feet he wears Peshawur shooting boots. All this is more or less of a uniform, and he is in a great measure a soldier, as may be seen by the Anglo-Indian cut of his beard, by his whiskers reaching to the moustache, and his stiff seat on horseback, which, by the way, does not denote a born horseman. We are in the thicket by the time that he has galloped up to us on his big Afghan horse. He puts himself at the head of our troop, and offers to show us the way.

Upon emerging from the rose-banks, which are intersected by marshy pools, we find ourselves in a stretch of country where the

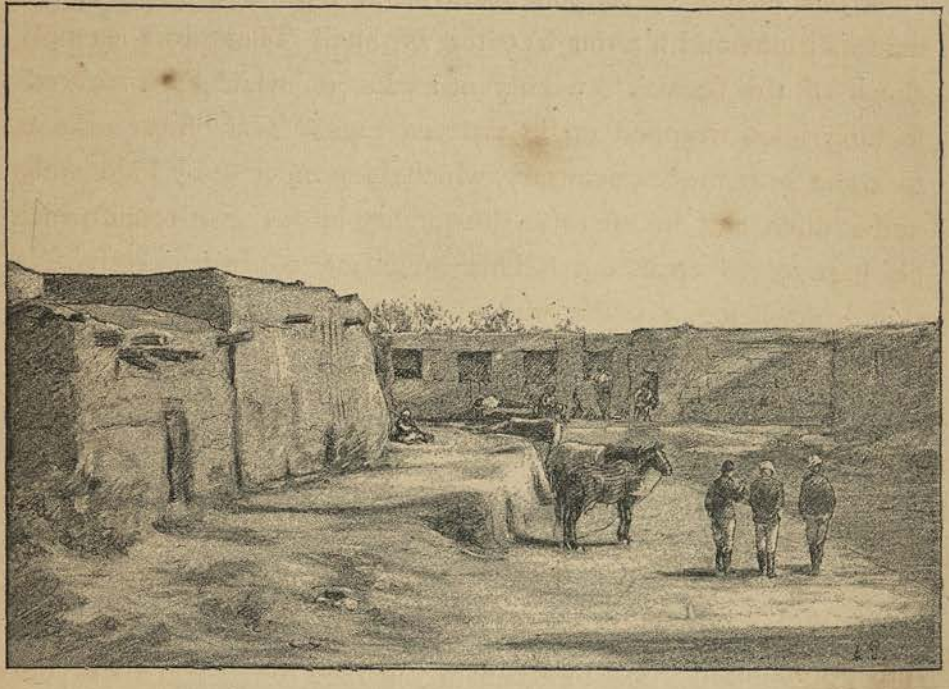
abodes of the Ersari Turkomans are scattered about in the fields surrounded by deep *aryks* (ditches), the ground being white with salt in many places. We pass through the cultivated fields of Chour Tepe, which have been formed out of reed beds, several of which still remain, and as we ride along we catch a glimpse of a canal, a horseman with pointed headdress, or a man on foot armed with a long rifle.

Upon coming close to a caravansary, we notice a few huts made of rushes, with a rough coating of mud. These are the empty shops of the bazaar, the only occupant of which is a starved-looking idiot, wrapped up in tattered rags. The officer asks us to come into the caravansary, which is protected by high walls and a ditch, and he offers us hospitality in his own room, which he hastens to clear out. This invitation to rest ourselves is significant, being a polite way of acquainting us not to go any further until orders have been received on the subject.

Without having proper papers, it is impossible to travel into Afghanistan. Authority from the emir is absolutely necessary, as is explained to us by a gigantic one-eyed Turkoman, who happens to be an acquaintance of Rachmed. He formerly served an Uzbeg chief at Urgut, whom the Russians packed off to Siberia for murder. When his master was arrested, he crossed the Amu into Afghanistan. He also informs us that there is, among the reeds, near the river bank, a post of Afghan soldiers, who have received orders to refuse the use of the ferry to any one who has not a paper with the mirza's visa, and that he has been sent for to see about us. He soon arrives, followed by three or four Afghans of a more or less hang-dog appearance and armed to the teeth, which he is not. He is very decently dressed, in wide pantaloons of white cotton and a sort of open tunic, with Peshawur slippers turning up at the toes, and an Afghan bonnet on his head. He is thickset, swarthy, and covered with hair; his bushy beard

covers nearly the whole of his face, the hair extending almost up to his eyes, which are black and very brilliant. He speaks shortly, but expresses himself in very elegant Russian, which astonishes Rachmed, who whispers to me that he must be anything but pleasant to do with when he is angry.

The mirza puts a lot of questions to us, and we endeavour to explain to him the scientific object of our journey, such as the



INTERIOR OF THE CARAVANSARY AT CHOUR-TEPE.

examination of the ruins of the ancient Bactra, visited by Alexander, the Arabs and the Moguls; the exploring of Kafiristan, which is inhabited by enemies of the Afghans, and supplies them with such fine slaves, which can be bought cheap at Chost. He knows about France, and seems to understand to what nationality we belong; he understands that we have no evil motives. He knows that our people is a powerful one, and that the Afghans have no reason to dislike the French. So he bids us welcome,

and advises us to await here the decision of the frontier chief, whom he will inform of our arrival. We tell him that we have only papers in French, which his chiefs do not understand. He reads the Persian visa and seems satisfied. The mirza assures us that to-morrow morning we shall have an answer; he believes that we shall be allowed to travel through Afghanistan.

As we do not wish to carry matters with a high hand, relying upon our diplomacy to pull us through, we settle down in the officer's room, and wonder whether we shall be allowed to pass, despite the diplomatists who want to keep the Afghans isolated.

OUTLINE OF THE BACTRA MOUNTAINS.

The important point is to establish the fact that we are French, and this is no easy matter with people who are the embodiment of suspicion, and who put no belief in the word spoken or the word written. For, as a matter of fact, if they are ready to believe in our nationality, our coming here will seem very extraordinary, and they will be inclined to think that we have a mission from our government. Their imaginations will be excited, and they will think that we are persons of importance. We must tell a convenient falsehood, and we shall see much that is interesting; in the first place, the city of Bactra, which has been in our thoughts

for so many years, probably to a much greater extent than it deserves to be.

The repast offered us by the mirza is a copious one. At night-fall, thanks to the obscurity, we receive letters from Europe, sent on to us from Samarcand by a courier, whom we instruct to remain on the other side of the stream, and we go to sleep happy in the receipt of news from our relations and friends.

October 15th.

Upon awaking, we hear a noise in the street, horsemen and people on foot passing on their way to the bazaar, this being market day. Butchers, with stalls in the open air, are cutting up carcases of cattle, of which we secure the undercuts. The Ersaris do not eat horseflesh, this custom being chiefly an Uzbeg and Kirghiz one. The chief food of the Turkomans in this region is the sorghum, of which they either roast the berries and eat them as they are cooked, wearing their teeth down to the level of the gums, or else grind them into flour and make a sort of polenta with it. Despite this very plain kind of food, they are generally very tall, with such strong limbs and frames, that they may be compared to the massive and gigantic Patagonians.

This puzzles the mirza, who says that the Afghans could not live on such fare; and he is surprised that, though better fed than these Ersaris, they are much smaller men.

"But," I said, "you are more courageous."

"Yes, that is true. There are not more than a dozen of us in the caravansary, and we have the whole country in subjection to us."

The day is spent in waiting for the reply, and watching the natives come and go. There are some Afghans mixed up in the crowd; they do not appear to be very rich, but they do not fraternize with the Turkomans. An aged Hindoo, with enormous

black-rimmed spectacles, accompanied by a little boy nearly naked, rides up with two ponies loaded with drugs. He soon has plenty of customers.

The mirza tells us that to-morrow we shall certainly have a reply. The caravansary is full of new faces.

October 16th.

"Iskandar Zulcarneïn conquered the seven parts of the world. He first defeated Dara, who took to flight. Dara was killed by his own men, but Iskandar arrived in time to receive the last wishes of the dying man. He took Dara's head upon his knees, and the latter said to him: 'Treat my family well, and, I pray of thee, kill them which have killed me.'

"Iskandar promised Dara to avenge him, and he conquered the five other parts of the world. The all-powerful Emperor of Tsin bestowed his daughter upon him; he subjected nations which lived in the entrails of the earth; he killed with his lance fishes which had bars of gold in their stomachs; he captured the most beautiful mares and the best stallions of Arabia."

This story of the mirza's was cut short by the arrival of three cavaliers, who halted near the door. One of them, with blue spectacles, riding a handsome horse, is accosted by Menas, who shows him to our room, several armed men standing close to the low doorway. The conversation takes place in Persian, and after the customary exchange of polite greetings, he begins to question us as to the object of our journey and our nationality, our replies being written down as they are made. We are in presence of the chief who has the surveillance of the Amu. His watch is not a very strict one, for if we had liked we could have gone to Balkh without stopping, but this march inland would not have done us any good, and would have irritated the Afghan authorities.

Our interlocutor does not in the least resemble the men he

commands, for he has a round face, a small nose slightly turned up, a large stomach, though he is not over thirty, and the big limbs of a Turk. He wears the uniform of his rank, as he tells us. He has a headdress similar to that of the Turkomans, but which looks as if it had had the hair shaved off it; and he wears a grey frieze tunic, with large brass buttons, tied in at the waist with a belt of English origin, as is the sword hanging from it. He has big boots like those of a French gendarme, whose duties he may be said to be discharging, and he has also a large knife stuck into his belt, cartridge boxes slung across his chest, and an enormous breech-loading rifle similar to that carried by sergeants of Sepoys in the Anglo-Indian army. He also carries a revolver, and there is no saying what he has in his pockets, if he has got any.

AFGHAN OFFICER.

When this young officer, with his intelligent face, has completed his interrogatories, we take the liberty of asking him where he was born and to what tribe he belongs. His reply was as follows—

"I am of Kurdish origin. It is just 127 years since Nadir-Shah the conqueror removed our tribe to the neighbourhood of Cabul. It was a numerous one, comprising nearly a thousand warriors, but to-day it is a small one, having scarcely a third as many."

"How do you account for that?"

"A great many have been killed in battle. We have no other calling but that of arms. You may know that I have written what you told me to Issa Khan Bey, at Masari-Cherif. He will reply to my letter to-morrow, and give orders for the journey through Afghanistan to be made easy for you. Consider this country as your own, ask me for whatever you like; I will procure it for you immediately, as I am your slave."

He made a low bow as he uttered these words, and then withdrew, returning almost at once to ask us who were the men that accompanied us. I then noticed that he had a ring of antimony round his eyes, and I could easily see from his strut that he was deeply impressed with the dignity of his office and that he had a very good opinion of his own person. He then went to a room on the other side of the courtyard, through a crevice in the closed shutters of which he watched us with close attention. But our rugs had need of being exposed in the sun, so we hung them to dry on cords which concealed us from his view and enabled one of our Arabs to hand us, without being seen, fresh letters which had come in from Samarcand.

In the evening, the Kurd paid us a visit in another dress, having taken off his boots and put on slippers with turned-up toes. We converse in Persian, and I lead the conversation on to the English and the Afghans. He praises the latter, vaunting their courage, their contempt for death, their spirit of independence. He says—

"When the Afghans are anywhere, there they remain, and they will die in their country rather than leave it. Their house is not much of it, but if they were offered a very beautiful one in exchange, one more beautiful than a star, they would not accept it."

"Have you lived in India?"

"Yes, a long time; it is the most beautiful and the richest of countries. Without India the English would be poor."

"Why do you say that?"

"I know it. I have seen the great things which they have made—the canals, the roads, the bridges. They have been of great benefit to the country. They have covered it with useful buildings."

"Do the Afghans like the English?"

"No."

"At the present time, the two peoples are friendly; you have some English as guests, you have stood in defence of common interests."

"We do not deceive ourselves as to English friendship, and rely only upon ourselves. They are very rich. I was with their Commission, a colonel got six thousand rupees a month, and you know what a large sum that is."

"Yes, that is fine pay."

"The Russians, upon the contrary, are poor. They have no money. Their generals are badly paid. Have they got many soldiers?"

"Yes."

"I had heard so. But for them the Afghans would have taken Bokhara long ago; they would have conquered the whole country up to Siberia?"

Rachmed protests and tells the Kurd that the people of Turkestan formerly captured Afghanistan, and that, well commanded, they might beat the Afghans. As to the Russians, they will seize whatever they please. With one blow of the hand they knocked down the Turkomans.

The Kurd shrugged his shoulders, and said—

"The Bokhara men are not soldiers; nor are the Turkomans. They are thieves whom it is easy to put to flight."

This brought Menas to have his say.

"I know the Turkomans; I know how they of Akkal fought at Geok-Tepe, and they have many *batirs* (heroes). The Afghans would never have got the upper hand of them, nor would the Persians."

This annoyed the chief very much, and made him exclaim—

"What do you mean by comparing the Persians to Afghans? The Persians are *heïvane* (animals), not men. But for the Russians we should have captured Persia a long time ago."

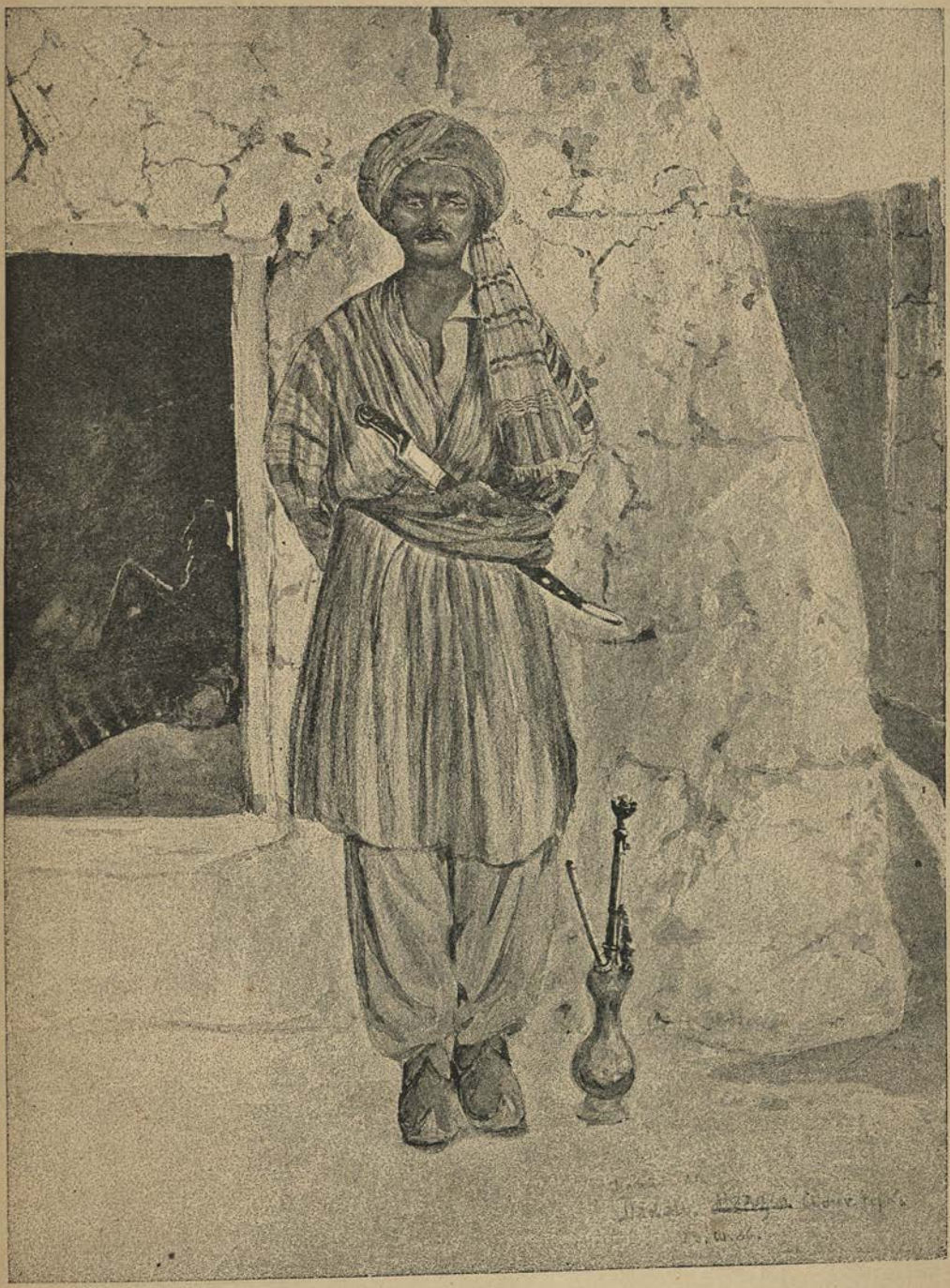
"But for the Russians!" put in Menas ironically.

I am obliged to make him hold his tongue, for he is very insolent, and he would soon be insulting the Kurd, whom it is our interest to make friendly, and who would soon lose his temper too.

"We are not afraid of either the Russians or the English," added the Kurd, looking straight at Menas, who smiled; "and we would fight to the last man rather than submit. The English know of what stuff we are made, and we have killed a good many of them. Eight years ago, a doctor who resembled you (pointing to Capus), with 150 of his men, perished at our hands."

"Did he and his men resist?"

"They fought like brave men, like heroes. They had barricaded themselves in a house and refused to surrender, our regiments surrounded the house, and they fired through the embrasures and from the roof. Our soldiers made a breach in the wall, and set fire to the house, but the Englishmen fought as long as there was any breath left in their bodies. One of them was a splendid shot; by Allah! he killed more than a hundred Afghans to his own gun. A bullet shattered his arm; he did not fall, but loading his rifle with one hand, he continued firing until a second bullet struck him in the flank. He then sank down, and one of our men went up and hacked him to pieces with his sword.



DADALI.

He never uttered a groan, merely opening his eyes occasionally. He was a hero.

"The Afghans are heroic, too, but in another way, and more courageous than the English, for they are not so well armed, and yet they do not hesitate to attack them. Where will you find a Russian or an Englishman who will go up to a tiger with a sword in his hand? There are not many men like Yakoob-Khan, and this is why he is carefully kept in durance. The Afghans are not chary in risking their lives, and if they are not agreed as to the conquests to be made, they will be as one man when it becomes a question of defending their country, and will die fighting to the last without asking for quarter."

Having finished this tirade, the speaker asked for a ghalyan, which his subordinate, the hideous Dadali, presented to him with a grin like a hyæna.

In answer to our approving observation that he "had spoken like a man," he said—

"Yes, I am a man; we are all of us men, but as to these Bokhara fellows. . . . Look at your mirza, he was trembling all over while I was questioning him. He was in such a fright that he was seized with fever, and you had to give him a remedy."

He only spoke the truth, for the mirza had fallen ill out of sheer fright, and had lost his appetite since he came here, while after the interrogatory administered to him, he had an attack of fever.

"And your Arabs, too," he added. "What do they look like? People are afraid of us in Asia."

We have him poured out one, two, several cups of tea, and he smokes our cigarettes at a rate which drives Menas, who is very economical by nature, to despair. The Kurd tells us that he has received a good education, that he speaks Hindustani, Turkish, Persian, and Pushti; that he has an atlas with maps of all the

countries in the world; that he knows India better than any one; that at Bombay he spent his time in the society of very pretty women, who lightened his purse for him; that his master, Issa-Khan, is a brave and courageous man, deep in the confidence of Abdurrhaman-Khan, who does not readily bestow his confidence.

"Is he a good emir?"

"Yes; he is just, but severe. At the present time he is having about thirty men beheaded daily, at Cabul alone."

"It is said that the Ghilzis have revolted against him. Is this true? Who fomented this disturbance?"

"Some discontented persons, who asserted that the emir showed too much partiality for foreigners. The importance of this rising was much exaggerated, and it was speedily put down."

The Kurd got up, in order to put an end to our questioning, which he no doubt considered very indiscreet.

As to the fact he stated, there can be no doubt about it—the Afghans are the foremost people in Asia as regards courage and aptitude for war. They are restless, violent, and of indomitable energy; they are fond of adventure, and, by comparison with their neighbours, they display great activity. Through contact with the English, in their struggles with native armies organized after European fashion, they have acquired a certain amount of military instruction, and if they had expended, to the north and to the west, the amount of effort required to protect their independence threatened from the east, there can be no doubt that they would have considerably increased their dominions during the last half-century. They would have extended their frontiers beyond the Oxus, doubtless to the foot of the Elburz, and the Russians would have had to fight them instead of the khans of Khiva and the emirs of Bokhara. The struggle would have lasted longer, but the results would have been more important and more decisive. The question of Central Asia would have been settled out of

hand, or would, at all events, have been wonderfully simplified by the suppression of one of its most important factors—the Afghan power and prestige. But history has its fatalities, finding a pleasure in spinning out its dramas, so that one often has the spectacle of a small people, very resolute and energetic, placed geographically beside large nations, which it keeps on the *qui vive*, biting them at the heel, just as an ant does a man with a gun who is taking aim at a pigeon, causing him to turn his head and miss his mark. Afghanistan is a large ant, and she will be of service to the more able of her two neighbours, to the one for whose benefit she will bite the other.

This was the view we took of things as we went off to sleep. We made some reflections also upon our own situation, and drew horoscopes as to the future, if this name can be given to the conjectures based upon the direction of the wind. The breeze comes from the east, and drives us westward. Is this not an unfavourable sign?

October 17th.

We receive a visit from the Kurd and the Afghan mirza, who, by the way, do not seem to get on very well. Their dispositions do not harmonize. One is a regular Afghan, and he has a civil appointment, being entrusted with the collection of taxes and the administration of justice; whereas the other is a military man, or considers himself such, for he likes to play at soldiers, and to relate his campaigns. We turn this antagonism to our profit, on the principle *divide et impera*.

I tell the Kurd that we are willing to await the reply of the governor Issa-Khan, but upon the condition that we are allowed to take a certain amount of exercise each day, this being essential to health. I inquire if there is not any game in the neighbourhood, and we are told that there are plenty of pheasants in the

bush. So it is settled that we are to go out after them this afternoon.

As we are jumping into the saddle, we see the fat Kurd coming up, armed from head to foot, with his cartridge-cases filled, his revolver loaded, and all the pomp and panoply of war. We compliment him upon his warlike appearance, and then, in order to let me see that he is quite up to his work, he executes with his enormous gun—an Enfield, if I am not mistaken—the various movements of rifle drill, calling out the word of command in English, and in stentorian tones: "Shoulder arms." "Present arms." He handles his weapon very well, having formerly served in the Anglo-Indian army in the Punjab.

When he has wheeled half-round, after the Prussian fashion, and stamped his foot on the ground before pivoting upon one leg, I cease to approve, and I tell him that an elegant soldier—this is very far-fetched—like him should execute the movement with more grace. I endeavour to prove to him that the half-turn round, *à la Française*, is very much better; and the mirza, who contradicts the officer at every opportunity, repeats with me that the first movement is heavy, and that it is suitable for a "fil;" that is, for an elephant.

The officer condescends to smile at the comparison, bestrides his horse with much dignity, and off we go.

Before we enter the thicket, two men, mounted upon one horse, come up with us, followed by an armed Afghan. I recognize the ferryman, who is in the saddle; but I do not know the man who is riding behind, though I assume from his accoutrements that he comes from Samarcand. Perhaps it is a man sent us from the other side, possibly a courier, who has brought us our letters, regardless of the strict injunctions we gave that they were not to be brought over.

The officer had gone on in front while I was making these

reflections, and exchanged a few words with the new-comers; then questioning Rachmed, who was behind, I continued to go forward, the others proceeding towards Chour-Tepe.

The officer rejoined me and said nothing, appearing to be much preoccupied.

I asked Rachmed what he had questioned him about.

"Whether I knew who it was that the ferryman had up behind."

"What did you answer?"

"That I did not know."

"Did you not guess, then, that he was a man from Samarcand?"

RETURNING FROM THE CHASE.

"No. I think you are right."

We wandered about in the wood after the pheasants, but though we saw several, we could not get within shot of them, the vicinity of human beings making them very wild. The officer did not get off his horse. We returned before sunset, setting our horses at full gallop, to see which would get in first. The officer thinks that I am trying to reach Chour-Tepe before him, so he whips his horse. But Pepin urges on his, which is much faster than either of ours, and soon passes us, much to the discomfiture of the poor man. He feels that he cannot come in first, and he is unwilling to leave me, being convinced that we have humbugged him.

Upon entering the courtyard of our residence, we find everybody on the move. The man whom we had met is there, and he presents us his compliments. It is he who has brought the letters. Menas, who had remained behind, saw at once who he had to deal with; and he backed up what the courier had said, declaring that he knew him, that we had left him behind, and that he was about to rejoin us.

These declarations being in contradiction with what Rachmed had said, the Afghans' suspicions were roused, and they were persuaded that we were in connivance with the Russians. This accounts for their surly looks, and for the lugubrious aspect of the Arabs, who did not know what was going to happen.

We resolve to tell the khan the truth, though that will not mend matters much, for truth is not current in this country, where a liar has as much chance of being believed as the most straightforward of men. I endeavour to dissipate the suspicions of the officer, by explaining to him that we had told a friend at Samarcand to forward any letters which might arrive for us from Europe after our departure. This friend was to look out for a man who would undertake to bring them to us, as we had not time to make this arrangement ourselves. Rachmed was quite right, therefore, in saying he did not know the man, and it was true; but Menas did not tell an untruth when he said that this man was in our service.

The officer appears to share our view, and to regard our explanation as very plausible. He protests his friendship for us, and calls us *bahadour* (valiant), loading us with flatteries. He is extremely amiable, and assures us that he is at our disposal, adding—

"The proof of the affection I feel for you is that I allowed you to go shooting to-day without any order from my chiefs. I run the risk of being severely punished, for the Emir Abdurrha-

man is one of those who exact unquestioning obedience, and he punishes the slightest peccadillo with death. Ask what you will of me; I will procure it for you at once."

He then withdraws, upon the ground that he is fatigued. The main door is closed and bolted with great care. We learn, through our men, who are on the watch, that the incident of the day is the subject of a lively discussion; that two long letters have been written, and that two horsemen have been despatched with them, despite the night being so dark. The Afghans are talking in whispers, and in their own tongue. It is evident that our affairs do not look very well; but we shall see what the morrow will bring forth. Moreover, the wind is blowing from the east.

October 18th.

We are assured that we shall have a letter from Mazari-Cherif in the evening. Several soldiers have come in from neighbouring posts. The garrison has been reinforced, and our slightest movements are watched. Rachmed having gone to sleep upon the sort of mud pulpit in the open air, from which the muezzin calls to prayer, he is looked for in all directions, and we are questioned as to his whereabouts with manifest anxiety. There is a regular alert, and some of the men look very gloomy. At last he is found, and the Afghans feel reassured.

We go to bed without any fresh news. It is a fine, starry night, and the wind is still in the east.

October 19th.

A Turkoman horseman arrives with a letter from Mazari-Cherif, late in the day. Orders are sent out to detain us—to prevent us from holding any communication with the right bank. We are forbidden to despatch any letters, to fetch any linen, sugar, or tea, at Tchochka-Guzar. I banter the officer upon this aimless severity, and give him to understand that if we were so

inclined we should soon be gone. I tell him this while he is seated with a cup of tea before him in our room, smoking our cigarettes without the least scruple. I explain to him in joke, accompanying my remark with a gesture to the same effect, that it would be easy for me to take him prisoner while he was within our reach.

AFGHAN NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER.

"I should take you by the neck, and in five minutes Rachmed would have bound you with strong cords. With our arms, we could kill you all in a trice; but we have no evil intentions, and we regard you as friends, though you treat us as prisoners."

"But you are not so," said the officer, with a forced smile. "You are our friends; the land of Afghanistan is yours. We are treating you in the usual way; similar measures are always taken with foreigners. You need not be under any uneasiness."

"How long will it last?"

"Barely twelve days!" he added with a pleasant smile; "only long enough to admit of a messenger going to Cabul and returning. The emir, you may rest assured, will at once come to a decision on your affair. He transacts business very rapidly. He will read my report, and he will at once send orders to show you

the curiosities of the district, of which there are not a few. But I doubt his permitting you to go to the Cafirs, as they are savages. You are our guests; your life is precious to us, and we could not allow you to risk it."

"Really!"

"The Afghan is the most hospitable of men, and I will guarantee you that you shall want for nothing."

"I am afraid that you are asking for the opinion of your friends the English; in which case we shall be kept waiting a long time."

"Do not think that. The emir is master in his own house, and he asks no one's advice."

Thus the situation becomes much clearer. We are overdone with compliments, but we are not to be allowed to leave. So we have no choice but to await the reply from Cabul, keeping our eyes and ears open, ready for any eventuality. And, above all, we must not go out to meet trouble, and must pass our time as pleasantly as possible.

This is what we did until the 6th of November, upon which day we received orders to turn back, and were escorted to the ferry.

The Afghans, particularly the mirza, with whom we had become close friends, soon became convinced that we were neither Russians nor English, thanks to our sprightliness, which was quite a novelty to them, and when their brains were not fuddled by the haschisch, which they were constantly smoking, they took part in our gambols, and laughed heartily with us. We had tamed nearly all of them, except the Hazaré Dadali, who was the best pattern of the brute in human form I ever saw. But we made even him dance, and then everybody was agreed that he looked just like a bear. We had succeeded in undermining the authority of the officer, whom we had finally nicknamed "the lawyer's clerk."

By dint of gaiety, we had won many sympathies. People are always grateful to you for dispelling their *ennui*, and the Afghans admitted that they had never laughed so much. Pepin took advantage of this to make some water-colour sketches of the most interesting of the troop, but others would not let themselves be taken at all.

We had a good deal to amuse us. As the pilgrims and traders on the march had to seek an interview with the authorities, in order to obtain leave to cross the ferry, we learnt some interesting news from these men. We walked up and down the courtyard, we climbed upon the roof to get a good view, and we made the Afghans relate stories to us.

PILGRIMS.

In some cases, travellers were compelled to pay a small "silao;" that is to say, to make a present before being allowed to cross the frontier without let or hindrance. Some who proved recalcitrant were beaten. We saw a certain number of Hindoos, which told us that the mountain road was a good one, that the emir was at war, that they had encountered the English Commission at such and such a place; in short, they gave us the news which at home would appear in the newspapers. Some of the pilgrims were going to Kashgar by the Ferghana; they had landed at Bombay, passed through Cabul and the Bamiane Pass, choosing this route in order to avoid the toilsome crossing of the Himalayas and of the Karakarum. We had noticed among their number a shrunken Arab, speaking a few words of Turkish, who had left his own country and followed a Kashgarian, in the hope of seeing China, which, he had been told, was a marvellous country. He had primed himself with information, and knew that he would have to pass by Aksu and Hami.

In the East, there are not the variety of amusements which

are to be found in Europe. Idle men in the West can easily fill up their time, thanks to many trifling occupations, and not find it hang heavy on their hands. They have fishing, novels from the circulating library, political gossip, the mania for collecting pipes, keys, or butterflies, excursions at cheap rates, with all the thousand inventions for preventing people from boring themselves to death, and satisfying the unquenchable thirst for novelty.

Whereas, in the East, the man who is consumed by the desire for action, who dreams of distant things, who for hours together

POWDER MAGAZINE AT CHOUR-TEPE.

listens to the flowery narratives of the story-tellers and the pilgrims, is seized all of a sudden with profound melancholy, and goes off to visit the holy places, as we should go to Switzerland. He spends years together on the high-road, exposed to unfavourable winds, detained in one place by want, in another by comfort, in a third by some complaint. He grows grey with staff in hand, and upon returning to his own country is surprised not to find it as his memory depicted it to him, for experience has opened his eyes. He will not in future be happy except when on the move, and he starts off again with the first caravan passing through the country, just as the migratory birds, which have been carried by a

hurricane upon some distant shore, live there, until they can see in the air a flock of emigrants, to which they attach themselves without knowing where they are going. All they want to do is to make a change. In the same way, these wanderers get to think, if the abuse of haschisch or opium does not nail them down to one spot, that what is new is best; and they spend all their lives in "going to see," like this lean Arab.

I must come back to Chour-Tepe, where, as I said, we were not without amusement.

Upon one occasion, we extracted a good deal of fun out of the discomfited appearance of our Bokhara mirza, who had been told by the "lawyer's clerk" that he had just received orders to send him off to Mazari-Cherif, and that he must put his traps together at once. The poor devil had merely made a submissive obeisance, and had begun to put his scanty wardrobe together with trembling hands. And as man is inclined to laugh at the misfortunes of others, we laughed fit to split our sides. We were not so unfeeling as the reader may fancy, for we knew that no such order was in existence, and that the inoffensive scribe had nothing to fear.

DADALI SHEEP.

We spent a short time in killing the innumerable flies which were buzzing about in our room. The pranks of the sheep belonging to Dadali, the Hazaré, also amused us very much. He followed his master like a dog, sniffed at the dishes, and made his droppings into them. He was always at loggerheads with the horses, eating the straw from one manger, and the barley from another. In short, he was a most amusing companion for three or four days.

Upon the morning of October 25th, we see in the courtyard a young Turkoman, who is busy sweeping it under the supervision of Dadali, who, perched upon the terrace, with his hands behind his back, vouchsafes him an occasional "Barik, Allah," uttered in a very dignified tone. The Turkoman's feet are chained, and he can only move about with great difficulty. They tell us his history, which is very like that of Eleazar and Jacob, the Turkoman playing the part of Jacob.

Two years before, he had arrived from Kerki, his only fortune being his spade, his fur cap, his clothes, and his sword. He went to the house of one of the wealthy Turkomans of Chour-Tepe, and offered his services. He soon won the good graces of his new master, who was the brother of his mother. A few weeks after his arrival, he concluded the following bargain with his uncle. He undertook to serve him for three years, upon condition that at the end of two years he should be given one of his cousins in marriage.

AMU TURKOMAN.

The future son-in-law, seeing that his position was well assured, sent for his mother, his sister, and his younger brother. He settled them into a *kappa* (shelter made of reeds), and took his younger brother to work with him. He recently had his cousin given him in marriage, or in payment, I ought rather to say. But as soon as the wedding was celebrated, he refused to do any more work for his father-in-law, upon the ground that he did not owe him anything more, though he had only served him two years. He argued that as his brother had

worked with him, he had in reality given his uncle four years' service instead of three. "Moreover," he added, "I am ready to give him his daughter back again, but he does not want her. He came to complain about me to the Afghan mirza, saying that I owed him 380 tengas (about £8) for his daughter. He had witnesses, and got me arrested, but I will not give way."

The next morning, being market-day, the father-in-law came to see his son-in-law, and advise him to compromise matters. But the son-in-law is obstinate, and won't have anything to do with his wife. In the afternoon, the contracting parties had a long discussion with some Turkomans, who wanted to buy the rejected woman, but after a lot of chaffering, the bargain fell through, owing to the hard terms demanded by the father.

It appears that the prisoner has been in trouble, and that the reason why he came over to Afghan territory was that he had already been in difficulties with the Bokhara authorities and the people of his own tribe. He is said to have committed several murders. These antecedents at once secure him the sympathy of our men, who ask him to take his meals with them, and cram him with food to such an extent that he "swells visibly before our very eyes." They have also suggested that they should help him to escape by striking off his irons. The Turkoman declines, saying that the time has not yet come, but that when it does arrive, he shall have no difficulty in getting away.

His brother comes to see him occasionally, and brings him some bread scones; he sweeps out the courtyard for him, and they then sit down and converse together in an undertone.

Upon the evening of October 29th, there is a violent north-west wind; the air is full of dust, the river roars, and a regular tempest sweeps along the valley of the Oxus. We shut ourselves up in our rooms and are trying to go to sleep, when Rachmed, who

THE EXORCISM.

sleeps outside the door, gets up and goes off. He comes back to tell us that the Afghans were looking just now for Dadali, who had disappeared while the Turkoman who was told off to keep guard over him was asleep in the mosque. He had been called for and hunted for in every corner, being finally discovered, sound asleep, in a ditch. They had shaken and beaten him, but had failed to wake him up. He was carried to the mirza's room, where, with his eyes still shut, he was quite delirious, and Rachmed asked us to come and see him.

As we got close to the door, we witnessed a very curious scene. A number of Afghans were sitting cross-legged all round the room. Three of them were holding the unfortunate man, who was talking all sorts of nonsense. The "lawyer's clerk" had taken up his Koran, and read with a nasal twang, amid the deep attention of the others, verses from "the book," at the same time laying on his hands. Then he struck the possessed man several blows on the face, threatening the evil spirit with great dignity. In the meanwhile, the sick man's sheep had sniffed its way to him, and was bleating in a most plaintive way, like a child at the death-bed of its parents. The exorcism does not produce the slightest effect; and despite the shower of blows directed against the djime, despite the rubbing of an onion over his nose, he does not recover.

He is delirious all the time; he sees enemies before him; he insults the emir, the Khan of Badakshan. And in this way we learn that Dadali has had to fly the country for rape, and his judicial antecedents are very bad. He speaks disparagingly of the wife of the Sirdar of Mazari-Cherif, and we then ascertain that this governor had resided for a long time at Samarcand, whence he brought back a wife chosen from among the women of bad character. Rachmed knows all about matters of this kind.

The demented man invokes Ali and Mahomet. The passage

of the English through Afghanistan has made a great impression upon him, "for," he howls, "the emir sent them five camels of melons, five camels of water melons, five camels of water, five camels of forage, etc., and this every day. But they sent the emir ten camels of gold, ten camels of rupees, ten camels of bricks, which will do to build a fine mosque in the middle of the desert, and ten more camels of bricks for the fountain to be built near the mosque."

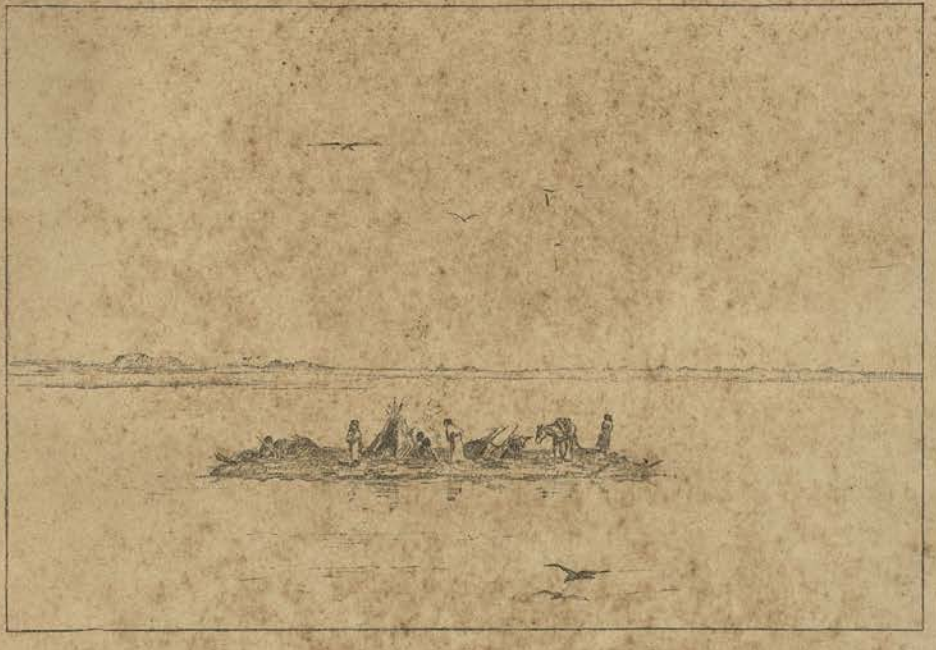
Abandoning this strain of ideas, and talking about us, he went on to say, "We have taken men who do not belong to our country; we will send two of them over the water without doing them any harm; we will send back two more after having beaten them. We will keep the mirza; and as to the three Cafirs (infidels), we will kill them, after having administered a sound flogging to them. We will cut their heads off and carry them to the Emir Abdurrhaman-Khan, who will give us many rupees, for we shall have engaged in a holy war (*gaza*)."

This was quite enough for us to hear, so we went back to bed, and the next morning we learnt that the prisoner had fled, and that all his family had crossed over to the other side on a raft, which his friends had secretly built with reeds. He left his wife, of course, behind him; and the Turkoman who had lived at Urgut asserts that the fugitive will have his revenge, and very easily too, for he is familiar with the dogs and horses of his father-in-law and knows what his habits are.

Dadali was for three days plunged in a sort of lethargy, from which he only aroused himself to proffer threats, to be delirious, and to writhe in convulsions. His chief, being afraid that he would assault some of his companions, sent him into the jungle, where he was placed in a hut, bound hand and foot, until he regained consciousness, without knowing what had happened to him.

Some people attributed this access of insanity to a philtre, the prescription for making which they gave us; the others maintained that he had simply been possessed of an evil spirit (djime).

Speaking of philtres, it may be interesting to mention how the natives wanted to use some cyanide of potassium which we had in a phial, in which we placed the insects we wanted to kill. The



RAFT UPON THE AMU.

"lawyer's clerk" had been much struck by the rapid death of a large spider which he had seen us put into this phial, and he at once asked us the name of this drug, telling us that we should give great pleasure to the Beg of Chahimardan (Mazari-Cherif) if we would present him with the contents of the phial.

"You see," he said, "that would kill a man without leaving any trace behind it. When one employs a sword, a knife, or a gun, there are also wounds to be seen, or traces of blood; when you strangle or hang a man, the face becomes livid, or the rope

leaves a mark. Whereas with this you kill your man, and no one can see how it is done. The relatives believe that he has died a natural death, and do not attempt to avenge him. It is very handy. What do you call the poison, as I want to write the name of it down ?"

"Cyanide of potassium."

"Canour potasiou. I will send this to the beg, as he will have some of this poison bought in India, and he will find it very useful !"

How nice !

Thereupon we cross the Amu again, for yesterday we were given to understand that we were forbidden access to Afghanistan.

A HALT.

Our good friends had, it appears, sent spies to Samarcand, and they had come back with the tidings that two of us were Russians and the third French, this being Pepin, who does not speak Russian. They had got their information in the bazaar, where we went very often ; and the natives, judging us by our dress and language, had taken us for Russians. So much for public rumours. The official reason given is that the emir cannot let us travel through his country until the Boundary Commission has completed its work ; which reminds me of what Méry said about commissions : "If a commission had been appointed to create the world, all would still be chaos."

We are escorted back to the stream with much ceremony.

Our mirza is overjoyed; the courier, who had been afraid that we should get into trouble, and who often made me significant gestures, putting up his hand to the back of his neck, is also very pleased. Before we embark, the Afghans tell Rachmed that if we cross the river a second time, without a written permit, they will hack us to pieces and throw our bodies into the stream. They want to frighten us, and apply to us the terrorising system which, according to the latest news, answers well with their emir at Çabul.

END OF VOL. I.

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